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AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS



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P S A L M S.

CCCCXCIV.

CHARACTERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

Ps. i. 1—4. *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful: but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so.*

THE Psalms were chiefly, though not exclusively, written by David: some were written, one at least, many hundred years before him; and several many hundred years after him. It is supposed that Ezra reduced them to the order in which they stand. We are sure that, in the Apostle's days, the Second Psalm occupied the same place that it does now; because it is quoted by him as "the Second Psalm." They are quoted continually in the New Testament as inspired of God: and so fully do they speak of Christ, that an account of his life and death, his work and offices, might be compiled from them almost as clearly as from the Gospels themselves. The psalm before us seems properly placed, as a kind of preface to the whole; inasmuch as it contains a summary description of the righteous and the wicked, both in their character and end. We will consider,

I. The description of the godly—

We are not to expect in a composition of this kind a full and accurate delineation of men's characters,

such as we might look for in a set discourse: nevertheless, in the brief notices here given us, we have what is abundantly sufficient to distinguish the saints from all other people upon the face of the earth. They are here described,

1. In plain terms—

[Two things we are told concerning them, namely, *What company they affect*, and, *What employment they delight in*. They have no pleasure in the society of ungodly men. They are aware that “evil communications will corrupt good manners;” and that the surest way to avoid infection, is, to come as little as possible in contact with those who are diseased. They see how fatal, and yet how common, is the progress of sin; that to *walk*, however occasionally, in the *counsel* of the *ungodly* (who are destitute of any religious principle), is a prelude to *standing* in the *way* of *sinners* (gross, open sinners), and, at last, to *sitting* in the *seat* of the *scornful*, who despise and deride all true piety. Hence, fearing lest, by unnecessarily associating with the wicked, they should be drawn to adopt their principles, and to imitate their conduct, they either withdraw from them altogether, or contract their intercourse with them, as much as will consist with a due discharge of their social and relative duties.

Privacy, and reading of the Holy Scriptures, are more congenial with their feelings, than the noise and vanity of the world. In the blessed word of God they see all the wonders of redeeming love: in that, they find the charter, by which they are entitled to an everlasting inheritance. There they behold thousands of exceeding great and precious promises, which are as marrow and fatness to their souls: there also they see marked out to them the way in which to please, and honour, and glorify their God: and, by meditating on these various precepts and promises, they find their souls cast, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel, and gradually transformed into the image of their God. Hence they delight to ruminate on the word of God; yea, “day and night” they make it their meditation and their joy: like Job, they “esteem it more than their necessary food.”]

2. By a beautiful comparison—

[In consequence of thus “eschewing evil and cleaving unto that which is good,” they become like a tree planted by the canals in Eastern countries, which flourishes with incessant verdure and fruitfulness, whilst all that are less favourably situated, are parched and withered by drought. The godly are “trees of righteousness, of the Lord’s planting:” their roots

are constantly watered by that "river which makes glad the city of God:" and by the fertilizing influences of the Spirit of God they bring forth in rich abundance "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." A diversity of seasons they doubtless experience: but never is their profession tarnished by openly visible decays, or by a want of such fruits as the peculiar season calls for. On the contrary, the winds and storms, and heat and cold, all tend to further their stability and fruitfulness; insomuch that "whatsoever they do," or whatsoever is done to them, "they prosper^a." See them in the diversified seasons of prosperity and adversity, they shew by their conduct "whose they are," even Christ's, "of whose fulness they continually receive," and "of whom all their fruit is found."]

In perfect contrast with this is,

II. The description of the ungodly—

Exceedingly pointed is that expression, "THE UNGODLY ARE NOT SO." No, indeed: they "are not so,"

1. In their character—

[The ungodly, instead of shunning the company of those who fear not God, prefer it; and would far rather associate with an avowed infidel, or a notorious libertine, than with one who was distinguished for the most exalted piety. They do not all proceed to the same extent of open profaneness; but all, without exception, "love darkness rather than light;" yea, "they hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved."

And as they prefer the society of them that know not God, so they prefer any other book, whether of science or amusement, before the sacred volume. They may study the Holy Scriptures indeed with a view to head-knowledge; but not with any desire to imbibe the spirit of them in their hearts, or to have their lives conformed to them. In this there is an extremely broad line of distinction between the two characters: to the godly the Scriptures are "sweeter than honey, or the honeycomb;" but to the ungodly they are insipid, and are either not perused at all, or studied only for the purpose of exercising a critical acumen. There is nothing in the sacred volume that is suited to their taste: the wonders of redemption do not affect their minds; nor are the precepts of the Gospel palatable to their souls.

Would we but candidly examine ourselves by these two marks, we should soon discover to which of these parties we belong.]

^a Rom. viii. 28.

2. In their condition^b—

[To such a tree as has been before described, the ungodly bear no resemblance: their root is fixed in the world: their fruit is no other than “grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrha.” But there is an appropriate comparison for them also; “they are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.” Truly, they are as light and worthless as chaff. No solid principle of piety is found in them; nor is there any thing in their character which God approves. To a superficial observer they may appear like wheat: but the fan or sieve will soon discover how empty and unsubstantial they are: or, if they continue mixed with the wheat in this world, the separation will speedily and infallibly take place in the world to come. The Judge of quick and dead will come, even He, of whom it is said, “His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire^c.” Amongst the wheat, not an atom of chaff will then be found; nor amongst the chaff, one grain of wheat^d. This, divested of metaphor, is plainly declared in the psalm before us; “The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous^e.” Ah! what an immense difference is here in the conditions of the two parties! the one approved of their God, and made partakers of everlasting felicity; the other, abhorred of him, and plunged into everlasting perdition^f!]

ADDRESS—

1. To young people—

[To you it appears but a small matter whom you choose for your associates. But, if you consider how much we are influenced by the sentiments and examples of others, and what awful consequences will follow from the conduct we pursue, we shall see the necessity of selecting those only for our friends, who, we have reason to believe, are the friends of God. Let not then the rank or talents of men, and still less their gaiety and dissipation, attract your regards; but let the piety of their hearts and the holiness of their lives, be their highest recommendation to your friendship. As our blessed Lord “was not of the world, so neither must ye be:” but you must “come out from among them, and be separate,” and choose for your companions “the excellent of the earth, and such as excel in virtue.^g”]

2. To those who profess godliness—

^b Nor in the “*blessedness*” of the saints have they any part or lot.

^c Matt. iii. 12.

^d Amos ix. 9.

^e ver. 5.

^f ver. 6.

^g Prov. iv. 14, 15. Jam. iv. 4. 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

[It is not by speculative notions that you are to judge of your state, but by your spirit, your temper, your whole conduct and conversation. "The tree must be known by its fruit." Now, as the ungodly form a perfect contrast with the godly, so let your spirit and conduct be a perfect contrast with theirs. Are the ungodly following the course of this world, and minding only the things of the flesh? Let it be said of you, "THEY ARE NOT so:" "their conversation is in heaven;" their delight is altogether in spiritual things; and "their fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." In a word, endeavour to be as different from the ungodly world around you, as a verdant and fruitful tree is from one which is withered and dead; and know, that, if you are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ for fresh supplies of his Spirit and grace, you shall receive from him such rich communications as shall be abundantly sufficient for you^h — —]

^h Hos. xiv. 4—7.

CCCCXCV.

OPPOSITION TO CHRIST VAIN.

Ps. ii. 1—12. *Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

THIS psalm, in its primary sense, relates to David: it declares the opposition which should be made to his establishment on the throne of Israel, and the final subjugation of all his enemies: both of which

events took place according to this prediction^a. But beyond a doubt a greater than David is here. There are several expressions in this psalm which are not at all applicable to the typical David, and which can pertain to none but the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Not even the highest angel could have that said of him, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee^b :” and, as that august title was inapplicable to David, so it could never be said of him, that he had “the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.” Moreover, when it is considered, that the expression, “Kiss the Son,” imported an act of divine worship; and that to “*trust* in” David would have been to give to a man the honour which was due to the Most High God alone^c; it will be clear, that the psalm was intended to describe, not earthly, but heavenly things, even the reign of Messiah himself, “the Lord’s Anointed.” And of him the Jews, before the coming of Christ, interpreted this psalm; as the modern Jews are constrained to acknowledge. Indeed it is manifest, that the Apostles understood it in this sense; not only because immediately after the day of Pentecost they so interpret it^d, but because in their controversy with the Jews they quote it in this sense, and argue upon it as accomplished in Christ’s victory over death and the grave^e. In reference to Christ, then, we will explain it, and shew,

I. The opposition that is made to him—

Christ is still, as formerly, opposed by all ranks and orders of men—

[No sooner was he born into the world than Herod sought to destroy him. During his ministry upon earth the attempts made upon his life were very numerous; and it was only by repeated miracles that he was saved. When the time for his being delivered into the hand of sinners drew nigh, the whole Jewish nation, as it were, rose up against him, to put him to death. His resurrection, and the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, were calculated to rectify the mistaken apprehensions of his enemies, and to disarm their malice: but

^a 2 Sam. v. 6, 7, 17. and 2 Sam. viii. 1—15. ^b Heb. i. 5.

^c Jer. xvii. 5. ^d Acts iv. 25—27 ^e Acts xiii. 32, 33.

no sooner was his Gospel preached by his disciples, than the same opposition raged against them also, and every possible effort was made to suppress the rising sect: not even death itself, in all its most tremendous forms, was deemed too severe a punishment for those who professed to believe in Christ. In this opposition all ranks and orders joined: the learned Scribes, the self-righteous Pharisees, the unbelieving Sadducees, all the highest orders both in Church and State, as well as the profane and licentious populace, were of one heart and mind in relation to this matter: they who agreed in no other thing under heaven, agreed in this, a deadly hatred to Christ, and an inveterate opposition to his cause.

And is not the same phenomenon seen at this day? In this one point there is perfect unanimity, wherever we come. As Herod and Pontius Pilate, who were before at variance, united cordially with each other for the purpose of oppressing Christ, so now persons who are most remote from each other in political and moral sentiment, or even in the general habits of their lives, all unite in decrying the Gospel as visionary in itself, and as injurious to the world. Let the Gospel be brought into any place, and this universal hatred to it immediately appears: nor can the Gospel be cordially embraced by any individual, without exciting in the minds of his friends and relatives a measure of indignation against him^f.]

This opposition is founded on an aversion to his strict and holy laws—

[Had the Apostles brought forward the Gospel as a matter of speculation only, they would never have been so bitterly persecuted in every place. The Jews were ready enough, of themselves, to follow false Apostles and false Christs: and the Gentiles would have welcomed the inventors or advocates of a new philosophy. It was the requiring of all persons to submit entirely and unreservedly to the dominion of Christ that irritated and inflamed the whole world against the preachers of Christianity. Thus, at this time, if we only brought forward the great truths of the Gospel in a speculative and argumentative way, no man would be offended with us: (multitudes of preachers do this without exciting any hatred or contempt in the minds of their hearers:) but the *practical* exhibition of divine truth, the shewing that all men must receive it at the peril of their souls, the insisting upon an entire surrender of their souls to Christ, to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his grace, and to be employed for his glory, *this* is the offence: we are *then* too earnest, too strict, too enthusiastic, too alarming: we *then* are represented

^f Matt. x. 22—25, 34—36.

as “turning the world upside down,” and are deemed little better than “the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things.” Nor will any thing screen us from this odium: we may be as learned, as blameless, as benevolent, as active as Paul himself, and yet, if we have any measure of his fidelity, we shall be sure enough to have some measure also of his treatment from an ungodly world.]

But the experience of all ages abundantly attests,

II. The vanity of that opposition—

Notwithstanding all the exertions of his enemies, Christ was exalted—

[It was “a vain thing that the people imagined,” when they supposed that they could defeat the purposes of the Most High in relation to the establishment of his Son upon the throne of Israel. “He that sitteth in the heavens laughed at them, and had them in derision.” In vain were the stone, the seal, the guard: at the appointed hour, Christ rose triumphant from the grave; and, on his ascension to the right hand of God, sent forth his Spirit to erect, in the hearts of men, that spiritual kingdom that shall never be moved: “Yet,” says God, “have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.” As the purpose of Jehovah respecting the typical David was fulfilled in due season, so was that “decree which Jehovah had declared” respecting “his anointed Son.” “The word grew and multiplied” in every place: and “the stone that had been cut out of the mountain without hands, broke in pieces” all adverse powers, and filled the whole Roman empire^g. The opposition raised by the Jewish nation against the Lord and his Christ, terminated only in the confusion of the opponents, on whom “the wrath of God” soon fell, and who are to this hour the most awful monuments of “his displeasure.”]

In due time his exaltation shall be complete—

[God having, in the resurrection of Christ, borne witness to him as his only-begotten Son^h, has engaged, in answer to his requests, to “give him the utmost ends of the earth for his possession.” And this he is gradually accomplishing: in every quarter of the globe is the Redeemer’s kingdom extending on the right hand and on the left: and though there is very much land still unsubdued before him, yet shall he “go on conquering and to conquer,” “till every enemy is put under his feet.” The enmity of the human heart, indeed, will still vent itself against him; but all who will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, “shall be broken in pieces like a potter’s vessel.” Whether we look to the world at large, or to any particular

^g Dan. ii. 34, 35.

^h Rom. i. 4.

individual in the world, the final issue of the contest will be the same: he *must* prevail, and “all his enemies shall become his footstoolⁱ.”]

Let us then contemplate,

III. Our duty with respect to him—

If He be “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords,”

Our duty is, to submit to him and serve him—

[A “*holy reverential fear*” becomes us in his presence: “He is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him.” Our fear of him should swallow up every other fear, and annihilate every desire that is contrary to his will. An external conformity to his laws will not suffice: he should reign in our hearts, and our “every thought should be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Not that our fear should be of a slavish kind: it is our privilege, and even our duty, to rejoice in him^k: yea, we should rejoice in him with most exalted joy, even “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified^l.” yet should our joy be tempered with humility, and our confidence with contrition. We should never so contemplate him as to forget ourselves, nor ever so triumph in him as to lose a jealousy over ourselves: we should “rejoice in the Lord always;” but still we should so temper this heavenly feeling as to “rejoice with trembling.”

With this reverential fear we should also maintain towards him a *devout affection*. Idolaters were wont to kiss their idols, in token of their entire and affectionate devotion to them^m: hence it is said, “*Kiss the Son*,” that is, let us consecrate ourselves to his service affectionately and with our whole hearts. A constrained service is altogether unacceptable to him: obedience would lose all its worth, if we accounted his yoke heavy or “his commandments grievous.” His law should be in our hearts, and a conformity to it should be our supreme desire and delight.]

This is the duty of all, without exception—

[It is a common sentiment, that religion is only for the poor, and that the rich and learned are in a good measure exempt from its restraints. But in the sight of God all men are on a level: all are equally dependent on him; all must give up an account to him; and “kings or judges of the earth” are quite as much subject to the command of Christ as the meanest of the human race. O let this awful delusion be

ⁱ Matt. xxii. 44.

^k Phil. iii. 3. and iv. 4.

^l 1 Pet. i. 8.

^m 1 Kings xix. 18. Hos. xiii. 2.

banished! Let none imagine that a superiority of rank or station at all lessens their responsibility to God, or absolves them from the smallest measure of obedience to Christ———]

This is also our truest wisdom and happiness—

If we say to any, “Serve the Lord,” we say, in effect, “Be wise:” for “the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of *wisdom*.” Those only who have never tasted of true piety, deride it as folly: and they only do it, because they do not like to confess their own folly in neglecting it: in their serious moments, and when their conscience is permitted to speak, the very despisers of godliness are constrained to say in their hearts, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!”

Moreover, it is the only true path of *happiness*: for, what happiness can they have who are obnoxious to the wrath of God? “If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little,” can they endure the thought of meeting his displeasure? “Are they stronger than he,” that they can feel themselves at ease, when they “have provoked him to jealousy?” No: the most careless of mankind, if he reflect at all, must be sensible, that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” We say then, “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him:” they shall be protected by his power; they shall be preserved by his grace; they shall be enriched by his bounty; they shall be blessed by him with all spiritual blessings; and in the last day they shall be seated with him on his throne, and be partakers of his glory for evermore.]

CCCCXCVI.

REGARD TO CHRIST ENFORCED.

Ps. ii. 12. *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*

TO so great a degree do the Psalms abound with prophecies relating to Christ, that all the most important circumstances of his life and death, his resurrection and glory, might be narrated from them with almost as much precision as in the Gospels themselves. The psalm before us has but a partial reference to David. It may be considered indeed as a triumphant proclamation of his establishment on his throne, notwithstanding all the opposition that

had been made to him by Saul and by the Jews themselves. But it principally points to the exaltation of Jesus to his throne of glory: and it concludes with an address to all the monarchs of the earth to submit themselves to his government.

In considering the words of the text, we shall call your attention to,

I. The injunction—

Who “the Son” is, we are at no loss to determine; since an inspired commentator has expressly declared him to be Christ^a. By “kissing” him, we are to understand,

1. Submission to his authority—

[Samuel having anointed Saul to be king of Israel, kissed him, in token of his submission to the power that was now vested in him^b. Now Jesus is “seated as King upon God’s holy hill in Zion^c,” and he demands that all should acknowledge him as their supreme Lord and only Saviour^d. His yoke in every view is hateful to us by nature; but most of all are we averse to “submit to his righteousness^e.” But this we must do, renouncing every other ground of dependence^f, and trusting in him as “The Lord our Righteousness^g.”]

2. Love to his person—

[When Mary desired to express her love to Jesus, she “kissed his feet^h,” and we also must feel in our hearts, and express, in every possible way, a fervent attachment to him. The characteristic mark of his disciples is, to “love him in sincerityⁱ.” Destitute of this mark, we have nothing to expect but speedy and everlasting destruction^k. We must therefore account him precious to our souls^l, yea, “fairer than ten thousand, and altogether lovely.” We must delight ourselves in contemplating his beauty, and maintaining fellowship with him^m.]

3. Devotion to his service—

[Idolaters used, in worshipping their gods, to kiss their imagesⁿ, or to kiss their hands in token of their devout regard to them^o. In this sense also we are to “kiss the Son,”

^a Compare ver. 7. with Heb. i. 5. ^b 1 Sam. x. 1. ^c ver. 6.

^d Compare Isai. xlv. 23, 24. with Rom. xiv. 11.

^e Rom. x. 3.

^f Phil. iii. 9.

^g Jer. xxiii. 6.

^h Luke vii. 38.

ⁱ Eph. vi. 24.

^k 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

^l 1 Pet. ii. 7.

^m 1 John i. 3.

ⁿ Hos. xiii. 2. 1 Kings xix. 18.

^o Job xxxi. 26, 27.

exercising the same faith in him that we do in the Most High God^p, and honouring him in every respect as we honour the Father^q. — — — To kiss him, like Judas, and betray him, will fearfully aggravate our condemnation.]

The vast importance of this injunction will appear, if we consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

And here we notice,

1. The danger of disobeying it—

[Gracious and loving as the Saviour is, he is susceptible of anger on just occasions, and feels a holy indignation against those who slight his love. And “if once his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little,” it will utterly destroy us^r. It will be but little consolation for us to see others suffering under his heavier displeasure: the person who feels the smallest portion of his wrath in hell, will be inexpressibly and eternally miserable: and therefore it becomes us to offer him the sincerest tribute of our affection without delay. Nothing but this can prevent our ruin. In whatever “way” we are walking, we shall “perish from it,” if we do not embrace him with the arms of faith, and “cleave to him with full purpose of heart^s.”]

2. The benefit arising from obedience to it—

[What was before metaphorically represented by “kissing the Son,” is here more simply expressed by “trusting in him.” In fact, a cordial and entire confidence in him, as “our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” comprehends all the duties which we are capable of performing towards him in this world.

Now such a trust in him renders a man inconceivably blessed. It brings peace into his soul: it obtains for him the forgiveness of all his sins; it secures “grace sufficient for him,” and “strength according to his day.” It makes him “blessed” in every state; in health or sickness, in wealth or poverty, in life or death. It entitles him to an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance in heaven. No creature that possessed it, ever perished. Glory and honour and immortality are the portion of “all that trust in Christ.” Whatever may have been their past conduct, or however they may doubt their own acceptance with God, they “*are*” blessed, and *shall be* blessed for evermore.]

APPLICATION—

[Here then is the direction which in God’s name we give to all; “Kiss the Son.” If you have any desire to escape the

^p Acts ix. 6. John xiv. 1.

^q John v. 23.

^r Rev. vi. 15—17.

^s Acts xi. 23.

wrath to come, or to lay hold on eternal life, this is the sure, the only way of attaining your end. Neglect Christ; and, whatever else you either have or do, it will avail you nothing: you must “perish” everlastingly^t. Love the Lord Jesus Christ, and give yourselves up unto him; and, notwithstanding your past sins, or present infirmities, “you shall never perish, but shall have everlasting life^u.”]

^t Luke xiv. 24. and John iii. 36.

^u John iii. 15, 16.

CCCCXCVII.

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE GODLY.

Ps. iv. 3. *Know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.*

RELIGION has in all ages been an object of derision to an ungodly world. There never have been wanting those who resembled Cain and Ishmael^a. God however has far other thoughts of those who serve him: the recollection of this is a comfort to the godly under their persecutions; the consideration of it too might be of great advantage to the ungodly. The Psalmist seems to be reproving the wicked for their contempt of God, and their injurious treatment of his people: he therefore, in a way of triumphant exultation, suggests the thought in the text.

We shall,

I. Shew who are the objects of the divine favour—

The world is divided into two descriptions of men, godly, and ungodly. The godly are to be distinguished by a great variety of marks—

They fear God—

[The generality sin without any shame or remorse^b. But the godly can no longer proceed in such an evil course^c. They humble themselves before God for their past offences. They guard against offending him, even in thought^d.]

They love God—

[They are not actuated by a merely slavish fear. They have the spirit of adoption given to them^e. They unfeignedly

^a Gal. iv. 29.

^b Eph. iv. 18, 19.

^c 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

^d 2 Cor. x. 5.

^e Gal. iv. 5.

delight to do their Father's will^f. They account the enjoyment of his favour to be their highest happiness^g.]

They serve God—

[Their religion does not consist in mere inefficacious feelings. They make it appear to the world that they are God's servants. They perform even their civil and social duties with a reference to him^h. They do every thing with a view to his gloryⁱ.]

They are despised indeed by the world, but approved by their God—

This will appear while we,

II. Declare the peculiar honour conferred upon them—

God has testified, in the strongest terms, his approbation of the godly. He has moreover “set them apart,” as distinct from those that perish—

This he did secretly in his eternal purpose—

[His regard for them did not commence *after* they became godly. Their godliness is the *fruit* and not the *cause* of his love^k. He loved them, and set his heart upon them, from eternity^l.]

He did it also openly, when he called them by his grace—

[These two periods of their separation are mentioned by St. Paul^m. In conversion, God sets apart sinners for himself. He inclines and enables them to come out from the worldⁿ. He causes them to devote themselves entirely to his service^o.]

He has set them apart too “for himself”—

[He makes their souls his own habitation^p. He sheds abroad his love in their hearts by his Holy Spirit. He preserves them as living monuments of his power and grace. He regards them as his own peculiar treasure^q.]

This being a point wherein all are deeply interested, we shall,

III. Commend the subject to your solemn attention—

This is not a matter of doubtful disputation—

^f Rom. vii. 22.

^g Ps. iv. 6, 7.

^h Rom. xiii. 5, 6.

ⁱ 1 Cor. x. 31.

^k Jer. xxxi. 3. See also 2 Tim. i. 9. and Rom. viii. 29, 30.

^l Eph. i. 4.

^m Gal. i. 15.

ⁿ 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^p 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^q Ps. cxxxv. 4.

[In every period of the world, God has had a peculiar people. They have been distinguished with special tokens of his love^r; and though they were not set apart for their holiness, they have invariably been made holy; moreover, when they were holy, God delighted in them as holy^s.]

Nor is it a matter of trifling concern—

[The Psalmist evidently speaks of it as deserving deep attention; and if it related only to this present state, it were worthy of notice. But the present separation of God's people for himself is a pledge and earnest of a future separation: in the day of judgment, God will complete what he here began^t. What distinguished honour will he then confer upon the godly^u! Then he will be their joy, and they his glory, for ever^x.]

Let *the ungodly* therefore know this to their shame—

[The Psalmist suggests the thought peculiarly in this view; and well may they be ashamed who despise what God loves. In vain do any hope to be God's hereafter, who are not his now. Let the ungodly therefore be ashamed of their false confidences. Let them set themselves apart for God, if they would have God set them apart for himself. Let them learn to live the life of the righteous, if they would die his death.]

But let *the godly* know it, to their unspeakable consolation—

[They who are beloved of God, have little reason to regard the contempt of men. God would have them assured of his superintending care. He would have them know their security, who take him for their God^v. Let the godly then rejoice in the honour conferred upon them. Let them look forward with joy to the final completion of God's gracious purposes towards them, and let them devote themselves more than ever to his service.]

^r Abel, Gen. iv. 4. Enoch, Noah, &c. Heb. xi. 5, 7. Paul, Acts ix. 15.

^s 1 Pet. iii. 4.

^t Matt. xxv. 32, 33.

^u Mal. iii. 17.

^x Rev. xxii. 3, 4.

^v Rom. viii. 31.

CCCCXCVIII.

A PRACTICAL EXHORTATION.

Ps. iv. 4, 5. *Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness: and put your trust in the Lord.*

IN the Psalms of David there is a great diversity ; some being expressive of his own experience, and abounding in petitions or thanksgivings, as the occasion required ; others being simply historical, for the information of the Church ; others prophetic of Christ and his kingdom in the world ; and others again being merely instructive, for the benefit of mankind. Of this last kind is the psalm before us ; in which, after declaring the comfort he had found in God, and offering a petition for the continuance of it (v. 1.), he reproves those who derided religion, and sought happiness in the world (v. 2.). He assures them, that God is the friend and portion of all who seek him (v. 3.) ; and recommends them to seek him in a becoming manner (v. 4, 5.) ; and from his own experience attests, that no increase of worldly prosperity can ever afford them so rich a recompence as *His* presence (v. 6, 7.), in which all who enjoy it find perfect rest (v. 8.).

As there is no certainty respecting the occasion on which it was written, we may take the text in a general view, and found upon it a general exhortation. Nor will there be any occasion for an artificial arrangement of it, because the different parts of the exhortation lie in an easy and natural order, and may be most profitably noticed as they arise in the text.

Beware, then, of sin ; or, as the text expresses it, “ Stand in awe, and sin not ”—

[The words “ Stand in awe ” are, in the Septuagint Translation, rendered, “ Be ye angry : ” and it seems that the Apostle Paul referred to them, when he said, “ Be ye angry, and sin not^a. ” The original imports a violent commotion of the mind ; and Bishop Horne translates it, “ tremble. ” Certainly sin ought to be an object of extreme fear and dread : we can never “ stand in awe ” of it too much. See what it has done in the world, how it has deformed the whole face of nature, and more especially the soul of man, which was originally made in the image of God himself ! See what was necessary for the expiation of it ! Could nothing but the blood of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son make an atonement for it, and shall it appear

^a Eph. iv. 26.

a light matter in our eyes? Go, take a view of the Saviour in Gethsemane and on the cross; and then say, whether sin be not a formidable evil: or go down to those regions where myriads of our unhappy fellow-creatures are suffering the penalty due to it, and then announce to us your sentiments respecting it. One glimpse of it, in its true character, would be abundantly sufficient to convince you, that death, in its most terrific shapes, has no terror in comparison of sin.

How, then, should you "stand in awe of it," even when presented to you in its most flattering dress! What if men tell you that it is harmless, and will bring with it no painful consequences? Will you listen to their delusions? Will you, through fear of their derision, or from a hope of their favour, give way to sin, and subject yourselves thereby to the wrath of an offended God? O! sin not, either in a way of commission, or of omission: and if a fiery furnace, or a den of lions, be set before you as the only alternative with sin, hesitate not to choose death in its most tremendous forms, rather than accept deliverance on the condition of committing any wilful transgression.]

That you may not be unwittingly offending God, be careful to live in habits of daily self-examination—

["Commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." Persons, at the moment that they are acting, are not always able to form a correct estimate of their conduct: they are blinded by self-love, and deceived by a partial view of the things in which they are engaged: and often find, on reflection, that they have reason to be ashamed of actions which, at the time of doing them, they conceived to be right. Not only did Paul, in his unconverted state, err, when "he thought he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus," but all the Apostles of our Lord erred in matters which, at the time, appeared to them to be highly commendable. Who can doubt but that Peter, when he dissuaded his Lord from submitting to his approaching sufferings, and when he cut off the ear of Malchus, took to himself credit for his zeal and love? and that afterwards, when accommodating himself to the wishes of his Jewish brethren, in requiring from the Gentiles the observance of the Law, he supposed himself to be actuated by a condescending regard to the prejudices of his less-instructed brethren? Yet, on all these occasions he acted a part most displeasing to God, and was no other than an agent of the devil himself. In like manner, when James and John would have called fire from heaven, to consume a Samaritan village, they "little knew what spirit they were of." And all the Apostles, when they joined with Judas in condemning the extravagance of her who poured a box of

ointment on their Master's feet, imagined that their regard for the poor was highly seasonable and praise-worthy. And it is probable that Thomas, too, considered his pertinacity, in requiring more substantial proofs of his Lord's resurrection, far preferable to the less cautious credulity of his fellow Apostles.

Thus it is, more or less, with all of us: we need reflection; we need instruction; we need to have the film removed from before our eyes: we need a more thorough knowledge of the motives and principles by which we are actuated. Things may be substantially right, yet wrong in the time and manner in which they are carried into effect: or they may be essentially wrong, and yet, through the blindness of our minds, appear to us highly commendable. This is particularly the case with many who spend their time in prosecuting offices which do not belong to them, whilst they overlook and neglect the duties which are proper to their calling. We are not to set one table of the Law against the other; or to trample upon acknowledged duties for the purpose of augmenting what we may fancy to be our religious advantages. Doubtless, where unreasonable men reduce us to the alternative of offending God or man, we must make our stand against the usurped authority, and be content to bear the consequences: but if we were more willing to exercise self-denial for the Lord's sake, we should find that the path of duty would in many instances be more clear, and that we should on many occasions have less ground for self-reproach.

Let us, then, at the close of every day, review with candour the events in which we have been engaged, and the dispositions we have exercised: and, not content with examining ourselves, let us beg of God to search and try us, and to shew us whatever there has been in our conduct that was sinful, or erroneous, or defective; that so we may be humbled for the past, and be more observant of our duty for the future.]

Yet must we not so lean to the side of contemplation as to become remiss in action—

[We are to "offer," and *that* with ever-increasing diligence, "the sacrifices of righteousness." We are all "a holy priesthood, who are to offer up spiritual sacrifices, which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Under the Law, there was a great variety of sacrifices; some for humiliation and others for thanksgiving. But, under the Gospel, every thing becomes a sacrifice, when it is done for God, and presented to him in the name of his dear Son. Doubtless the first offering which we are to present to God is our own heart^b. Without that, no other can come up with acceptance

^b 2 Cor. viii. 5.

before him. But, when we have presented ourselves to him as “a living sacrifice^c,” there is not any service which we can offer, which will not be pleasing in his sight. Let us then abound in every good work, and seek to “be filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” The duties of the closet demand our attention in the first place: for, if they be neglected, nothing can go well: the soul will be left to its own resources, and will of necessity fall a prey to sin and Satan. Then come the duties of our place and station, whether in social or civil life. To neglect these, is to sin grievously against God, and to bring great disgrace upon religion. Every person in the family has his proper office, which he is bound to fill, not from necessity only, but for the honour of his God. Whilst the head of it is prosecuting his proper business, the mistress is to be superintending the concerns of her family; and, whether occupied with her children or domestics, is to be discharging her duties with care and diligence; whilst the servants, each in his proper place, are to be executing their part with fidelity and zeal. The time that can be spared from these more appropriate avocations may well be devoted to the service of the public, in any line that may be thought most conducive to the welfare of mankind. But it is possible for men to be so engaged in cultivating the vineyards of others as to neglect their own. And this, in the present day especially, when so much time is consecrated to the maintenance of religious or benevolent societies, is a danger to which many are exposed. Care must be taken, that none who are entitled to our services be neglected; and that, whilst some rejoice in what we do, none have reason to complain of what we leave undone. The public assemblies, too, must not be neglected: they are the appointed means of honouring God, and of bringing his blessing on our own souls. In a word, our duties both to God and man are to be harmoniously and diligently performed: and it must be the labour of all, according to their respective abilities, to “abound in every good word and work.”]

But, in whatever way our own efforts are directed, we must “put our trust in the Lord”—

[It is to *his grace* alone that we must be indebted *for strength*; to *his mercy* must we look *for acceptance* before him; and on *his truth and faithfulness* must we rely for our *ultimate reward*.

Of ourselves we can do nothing. In vain will be all our efforts to escape from sin, or to fulfil our duty, if God do not “strengthen us with might by his Spirit in our inward man.”

^c Rom. xii. 1.

We must look to God to “work all our works in us:” “all our fresh springs must be in him.” To rely simply on God is the only way of being really strong; as the Apostle says, “When I am weak, then am I strong;” and the more entire our reliance is on him, the more will his strength be perfected in our weakness.

At the same time, we must bear in mind how exceedingly defective our best services are; and must renounce all hope in “our own righteousness, as being in itself no better than filthy rags.” If St. Paul, with all his transcendent excellencies, “desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith in Christ,” much more must we do so, whose righteousness falls so far short of his. Our constant and grateful acknowledgment must be, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength.” Yes; “in the Lord must all the seed of Israel be justified, and in him alone must they glory.”

Yet we must not imagine that our services shall go unrewarded: for, though our works shall not go before us to heaven, to supersede the office of a Saviour, “they shall follow us, to attest our love to him, and shall be acknowledged by him as worthy of a gracious recompence.” Not even a cup of cold water given to one of his disciples shall lose its reward. God would even consider himself as “unrighteous, if he were to forget our works and labours of love, which we have shewed towards his name.” Be assured, therefore, that he will bring forth, at the last day, whatever you have done for him, and will both applaud and recompense it before the assembled universe.

Here, then, you have abundant encouragement to exercise yourselves with all diligence in the preceding duties of fear and vigilance, of piety and affiance. And know, that the more you endeavour to approve yourselves to God, the more shall you be approved by him in the day of judgment.]

CCCCXCIX.

GOD'S FAVOUR THE ONLY SUBSTANTIAL GOOD.

Ps. iv. 6. *There be many that say, Who will shew us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!*

SELF-SUFFICIENCY pertains to God alone: he alone is not dependent on any other for his own happiness. The creature must of necessity be dependent, and must derive its happiness from some other source. The angels around the throne are blessed only in the

fruition of their God. Man, of course, is subject to the same necessity of seeking happiness in something extraneous to himself: and unhappily, through the blindness of his understanding, the perverseness of his will, and the corruptness of his affections, he seeks it in the creature rather than in the Creator. Hence the universal inquiry spoken of in our text, "Who will shew us any good?" But there are some whose minds are enlightened, and whose desires centre in their proper object; and who, in answer to the proposed inquiry, reply, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us!"

To illustrate the wisdom of their choice, we will consider more at large,

I. The world's inquiry—

A desire of good being natural, it is of necessity universal—

[From infancy to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to old age, the inquiry is continued, Who will shew us any good? who will shew us any thing wherein our minds may repose, and find the largest measure of satisfaction? Agreeably to this universal sentiment, all prosecute the same object, in the ways wherein they think themselves most likely to attain it. The *merchant* seeks it in his business, and hopes that in due time he shall find it in the acquisition of wealth. The *soldier* looks for it in the dangers and fatigues of war, and trusts that he shall find it in the laurels of victory, the acquisition of rank, and the applause of men. The *traveller* searches for it in foreign climes, in expectation that he shall possess it in an expansion of mind, and in those elegant acquirements, which shall render him the admiration of the circle in which he moves. The *statesman* conceives he shall find it in the possession of power, the exertion of influence, and the success of his plans. The *philosopher* imagines that it must surely be found in his diversified and laborious researches; whilst the *devotee* follows after it with confidence in cloistered seclusion, in religious contemplation, and in the observance of ceremonies of man's invention. Others pursue a widely different course. The *voluptuary* follows after his object in a way of sensual gratification, and in the unrestrained indulgence of all his appetites. The *gamester* affects rather the excitement of his feelings in another way; and hopes, that, in the exultation arising from successful hazard, and from sudden gain, he shall enjoy the happiness which his soul panteth after. The *miser*, on the

other hand, will neither risk, nor spend more than he can avoid; but seeks his good in an accumulation of riches, and a conceit that he possesses what shall abundantly suffice for the supply of all his future wants. We might pursue the subject through all the different departments of life; but sufficient has been said to shew, that all are inquiring after good. True indeed it is, that many seek their happiness in evil, as the drunkard, the robber, and all other transgressors of God's laws. But no man seeks evil *as evil*; he seeks it under the idea of *good*, and from the expectation that, *circumstanced as he is*, the thing which he does will, *on the whole*, most contribute to his happiness.]

This inquiry after good is in itself commendable, and proper to be indulged—

[The brute creation are directed by instinct to things which are conducive to their welfare: but man must have his pursuits regulated by the wisdom and experience of others, to whom therefore he must look up for instruction. But it is much to be regretted that the generality inquire rather of the ignorant than of the well-instructed, and follow their passions rather than their reason. If men would but go to the Holy Scriptures, and take counsel of their God, they would soon have their views rectified, and their paths directed into the way of peace.]

To such inquiries we proceed to state,

II. The believer's answer—

The believer's answer comes not from his head merely, but from his heart. There he has a fixed and rooted principle, which tells him, that happiness is to be found in God alone: so that, despising in comparison all other objects, he says, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me!" "In thy favour is life," and "thy loving-kindness is better to me than life itself."

That a sense of the Divine favour is the best and greatest good, will appear from the following considerations:

1. It gives a zest to all other good—

[Let a man possess all that the world can bestow, the greatest opulence, the highest honours, the kindest friends, the dearest connexions, his happiness will after all be very contracted, if he have not also the light of God's countenance lifted up upon him. But let him be favoured with the Divine

presence, he will taste, not the comfort merely that is in the creature, but God's love in the creature. This will be like the sun shining on a beautiful prospect, every object of which receives a ten-fold beauty from his rays; whilst the spectator himself, revived with its cheering influence, has his enjoyment of them exceedingly enhanced. Here David, amidst all his elevation to dignity and power, found his happiness^a: and here alone, whatever else we may enjoy, can it be truly found^b.]

2. It supplies the place of all other good—

[Let a person be destitute, not only of the fore-mentioned comforts, but also of health, and liberty, and ease, yet will he, in the light of God's countenance, find all that his soul can desire. Behold Paul and Silas in prison, with their feet in the stocks, and their backs torn with scourges! Are they unhappy? No; they sing; they sing aloud at midnight: and what is it that thus enables them to rise above all the feelings of humanity? It is their sense of the Divine presence, and of his blessing upon their souls. And in like manner may the poorest and most destitute of all the human race exult, if only the love of God be shed abroad in his heart: he may adopt the language of St. Paul, and speak of himself "as having *nothing*, and yet possessing *all things*^c."]]

3. It paves the way to all other good—

[Earthly blessings may come alone: but the favour of God brings along with it every other blessing that God can bestow. Even earthly things, as far as they are needful, "are added to those who seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness:" and we need scarcely say what peace, and joy, and love, and holiness in all its branches, are brought into the soul in communion with a reconciled God. We may confidently say with Paul, "All things are yours, if ye are Christ's^d."]]

4. It will never cloy—

[There is no earthly gratification which may not be enjoyed to satiety: but who was ever weary of the Divine presence? In whom did a sense of God's pardoning love ever excite disgust? A man "in a fulness of earthly sufficiency may be in straits^e:" and it not unfrequently happens, that the rich have less comfort in their abundance than the poor in their meaner and more scanty pittance. But "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it^f:" the man who

^a Ps. xxi. 1—6.

^b Ps. cxliv. ; in the close of which, David corrects, as it were, what he had said in the two preceding verses.

^c 2 Cor. vi. 10.

^d 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

^e Job xx. 22. Prov. xiv. 13.

^f Prov. x. 22.

possesses it has not his enjoyment lessened by repetition or repletion; but, on the contrary, has his capacities enlarged, in proportion as the communications of God's favour are enlarged towards him.]

5. It will never end—

[Whatever we possess here, we must soon bid farewell to it: whether our enjoyment be intellectual or corporeal, it must soon come to an end. But the favour of God will last for ever, and will then be enjoyed in all its inconceivable fulness, when death shall have deprived us of every other enjoyment. “In God's presence there is a fulness of joy; and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore^g.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are seeking happiness in the things of time and sense—

[We ask the votaries of this world, Whether they have ever found that permanent satisfaction in earthly things which they once hoped for? Has not the creature proved itself to be “a broken cistern that can hold no water?” and is not Solomon's testimony confirmed by universal experience, that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit?” If this then be true, why will ye not avail yourselves of that information, and go for all your comforts to the fountain-head? “Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me; and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness^h.” O let the blessing which the priests of old were authorized to pronounce, be the one object of your desiresⁱ! and we will venture beforehand to assure you, that you shall never seek for it in vain. After other things you may inquire, and labour in vain: but the man that looks to God, as reconciled to him in Christ Jesus, and desires above all things his favour, shall never be disappointed of his hope.]

2. Those who are seeking their happiness in God—

[Professing, as you do, that God is a sufficient portion, the world will expect to find that you are superior to it; and that you live as citizens and expectants of a better country. Thus it was that the saints of old lived^k; and thus must we live, even as our blessed Lord himself set us an example. If the world hear you inquiring, Who will shew me any good? and see you seeking it in the vanities of time and sense, will they not say, that religion is an empty name, and that it can

^g Ps. xvi. 11.

^h Isai. lv. 2.

ⁱ Numb. vi. 24—26.

^k Heb. xi. 9, 10.

no more satisfy the soul than their vanities can do? O give not reason for any such sentiment as this! but let it be seen, that in having God for your portion, you have a good, which none can estimate but those who possess it, and which the whole world are unable either to diminish or augment¹.]

¹ Ps. lxxiii. 25.

D.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Ps. v. 11, 12. *Let all those that put their trust in Thee, rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee. For thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous: with favour wilt thou compass him, as with a shield.*

DAVID, in speaking of the persecutions which he endured from Saul, represents them as accompanied with every species of malignity on the part of his oppressors: "There is no faithfulness in their mouth: their inward part is very wickedness: their throat is an open sepulchre: they flatter with their tongue." This character we should have been disposed to limit to the agents of Saul: but St. Paul teaches us to consider it as descriptive of human nature generally, and to apply it, without exception, to every child of man^a. The fact is, that human nature is the same in all ages and places: and if it was so corrupt whilst under the immediate government of God himself, much more may it be expected to manifest similar corruption under circumstances less favourable for its control. Doubtless, to be reduced to a level with such abandoned men is very humiliating: but it is consoling to know, that if, on the one hand, we resemble *them* by nature, we, on the other hand, are partakers of all *David's* privileges, as soon as ever we are renewed by divine grace. Under his great and accumulated trials, he was often filled with a holy and unutterable joy in God: and such joy is our portion also, if, like him, we place our confidence in God. This is expressly asserted in our text, in which we behold,

^a Rom. iii. 13.

I. The character of "the righteous"—

In delineating this, the generality of persons would refer to *actions* only, and to those chiefly which had respect to *men*. But this would give a very partial and inadequate view of the subject. The truth is, that man's character is to be estimated, not so much by his *actions towards men*, as by *the habit of his mind towards God*. I mean not to say, that actions are not necessary to evince the truth and excellence of the internal principle; for the principle that is unproductive of holy fruit, is of no value; it is a hypocritical pretence, a mere delusion. But actions, though good in themselves, as prayers and alms-givings, may proceed from a vicious principle, and, instead of being acceptable to God, may be perfectly odious in his sight. Hence the righteous are described by characters that admit of no doubt:

1. They trust in God—

[The righteous have a view of God as ordering all things both in heaven and earth. They know, assuredly, that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his special permission. They see that both men and devils are but as instruments in his hands; and that, however unconscious they may be of any over-ruling power, they do, in fact, fulfil the will of Almighty God. Hence, whatever be done, they receive it as from God; and whatever be devised against them, they feel themselves secure in his hands. They know that, without him, "no weapon that is formed against them can prosper;" and that, through his gracious care, "all things shall work together for their good."

David was exposed to the most imminent dangers through the malice of Saul: but "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God," and committed all his concerns to him. So the true saint, whoever he may be, flees to God as a sure refuge, and hides himself under the shadow of his wings; assured that, when so protected, no enemy can assault him, no evil find access to him.

In the *grace* of God, too, they trust as well as in *his providence*. They are well assured, that there is no hope for them in themselves, either as it respects the obtaining of reconciliation with God, or the fulfilling of his holy will. On the mercy of God, therefore, and on the merits of their Saviour, they rely for pardon and acceptance; and to the Lord Jesus they look for such supplies of grace, as their necessities require.

Renouncing all confidence in themselves, they go forward, saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength."]

2. They love God—

[They behold his glorious perfections, particularly as displayed in the Son of his love, "who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person:" and with holy admiration they prostrate themselves before him, saying, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty!" They also contemplate with wonder and gratitude the love which he has shewn to them, in choosing them, from before the foundation of the world, to be the monuments of his grace, and in imparting to them such supplies of his Spirit as are made effectual for their salvation. It is well said, that "to them that believe, Christ is precious." Yes, "his very name is as ointment poured forth:" and to hear and speak of him is the most delightful employment of their souls.

Now, I say, these are the characteristic virtues of the righteous: and these are the graces which are of supreme excellence in the sight of God. It is evident, that by the exercise of these dispositions God is more honoured than in all the external acts that can ever be performed; because he himself is the object on whom they terminate, and whose glory they promote.]

In immediate connexion with these dispositions is,

II. Their blessedness—

1. Who so joyful as they?

["Let them rejoice," says the Psalmist, yea, "let them ever shout for joy." This is their privilege; this is their duty: the very command of God himself is, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." "Rejoice evermore: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." True it is, that there are seasons for humiliation, as well as for joy: but it is true also, that though, in the experience of the worldling, there is a direct opposition between the two feelings, so that they cannot exist together, they may in the saint be called forth into simultaneous exercise and harmonious operation. Indeed, there is no sublimer joy than that which arises out of penitential sorrow, and is tempered by contrition. The very posture of the glorified saints in heaven bears testimony to this: for they fall on their faces before the throne, at the very time that they sing aloud "to Him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood." But you will particularly notice what is said, "They rejoice *in Him*:" it is not in themselves, but in Him alone, "in whom all their fresh springs are found."]

2. Who has such ground for joy as they?

[They are already under the care and protection of their God, “who defendeth them” from the assaults of all their enemies, and who has pledged himself to be their Protector even to the end: as David says, “Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him, as with a shield.” There is, in another psalm, a remarkable expression, which beautifully illustrates this: “Thou wilt hide them *in the secret of thy presence*.” The believer, when sensible of God’s presence with his soul, has an assurance of his protection, as much as if he saw with his bodily eyes the whole heavens filled with chariots of fire, and horses of fire, for his defence. He then realizes in his mind the idea, that God is a wall of fire round about him; and that whoever shall think to scale it will not only fail, but perish in the attempt. Verily, to feel one’s self thus in the very bosom of our God is “a joy with which the stranger intermeddleth not,” “a joy that is unspeakable and glorified.”]

APPLICATION—

[Seek to be truly “righteous.” Forget not wherein that character primarily consists. Seek to know God, to trust in him, and to love him; to know him as revealed to us in his Gospel; to trust in him as a Covenant-God and Saviour; and to love him with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. Let a sense of his presence with you be your chief joy, and every action of your life be performed for his glory. So will you be preserved from every enemy, and your blessedness be an antepast of heaven.]

DI.

GOD’S INDIGNATION AGAINST THE WICKED.

Ps. vii. 11—13. *God judgeth the righteous; and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death.*

IN one psalm, David begins, “The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice:” in another, “The Lord reigneth; let the earth tremble^a.” Either exhortation is suitable, according to the persons who are more especially addressed. The godly may well rejoice, that He, whom they serve, has all things at his

^a Ps. xcvi. 1. and xcix. 1.

command: and well may the ungodly tremble, that He whom they offend is able to vindicate the honour of his insulted Majesty. To the oppressors and oppressed, this truth is of equal moment. The oppressed David, reflecting on it with delight, said, "My defence is of God, which saveth the upright in heart^b." But the oppressor may expect this Almighty Being to espouse the cause of his people, and to execute upon their enemies the vengeance they deserve.

In the words before us we see the conduct of God,

I. In his moral government here—

The righteous are the objects of his tender care—

[The Jews were governed by judges for above four hundred years^c: and the term "judging" was used as importing government and protection. In this sense David uses it in another psalm, where he says, "O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for Thou shalt *judge* the people righteously, and *govern* the nations upon earth^d." Now, there is not any benefit which the most wise or powerful monarch can bestow on his subjects, which God will not impart to his obedient people. Particularly will he shield them from every oppressor, and keep them safely under the shadow of his wings. His care of Abraham and the Patriarchs, in all their pilgrimages, and in all their perils, well illustrates this; as does more especially his constant and miraculous interposition on the behalf of David, amidst the bitter persecutions of the unrelenting Saul. The deliverances vouchsafed to God's saints of old are still continued to his Church and people; though, from their being less visible, they are, for the most part, overlooked. But God is still "a wall of fire round about them^e;" and "whosoever toucheth one of them toucheth the apple of his eye^f."]

The wicked, on the contrary, are the objects of his merited displeasure—

[He is not indifferent about the actions of men, as too many suppose. He marks the conduct of the wicked; and "he is angry with them every day." Of course, we are not to suppose that God really feels those strong emotions which we call anger and wrath: such expressions are applied to him only in a figurative sense, in order to teach us what will be his dispensations towards us. But we do right to use the language of Scripture: and, in conformity with that, I say, that he views

^b ver. 10.

^c Acts xiii. 20.

^d Ps. lxxvii. 4.

^e Zech. ii. 5.

^f Zech. ii. 8.

with indignation the impiety of those who cast off his fear, and walk after the imagination of their own hearts. Whether their actions be more or less decent in the eyes of the world, it makes but little difference in his eyes, so long as they live to themselves, instead of unto him. He looks for them to repent, and “turn to him:” and for this event he waits with much long-suffering and forbearance, “not willing that any of them should perish, but that they all should come to repentance and live.” If they would turn to him, he would lay aside his anger in an instant, and receive them to the arms of mercy. But, whilst they continue impenitent, he meditates nothing but to display towards them his merited indignation. With a view to their excision, “he whets his sword, and bends, with an unerring hand, his bow for their destruction.” Could we but see with the eye of faith, we should behold the arrow, now already on the string, pointed at their hearts; and nothing remaining, but that the string be loosed from his hand, to bring them down, and to cast them into everlasting perdition. For them, too, he is preparing the instrument of death, even of everlasting death: as it is written, “Tophet is ordained of old; for the King it is prepared: he hath made it deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood: the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it^g.” Happy would it be if a thoughtless world would consider this: for, whether they will reflect upon it or not, “their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not^h.”]

This equitable discrimination will be rendered visible to all,

II. In his judicial proceedings at the last day—

Then will he approve and reward the righteous—

[Here they are traduced, and loaded with all manner of obloquy: but there, “He, that trieth the hearts and reinsⁱ,” will appear in their behalf, and vindicate them from the calumnies with which they have been aspersed. He will bear testimony to those secret principles of faith and love whereby they were enabled to live to his glory; and then shall “their righteousness shine forth as the noon-day.” All that they did for him in this world was misinterpreted, as proceeding from pride, or vanity, or hypocrisy: but he will acknowledge them as “Israelites in whom was no guile;” and, in the presence of their now prostrate enemies, he will exalt them to thrones and kingdoms for evermore.]

But the wicked he will then consign to merited shame and punishment—

^g Isai. xxx. 33.

^h 2 Pet. ii. 3.

ⁱ Ps. vii. 9.

[It is remarkable that the day of judgment is called, by St. Peter, "the day of the perdition of ungodly men^k." Yes, here, for the most part, they escaped punishment: but there they shall all, without exception, meet a just reward. Where-soever they have fled to hide themselves, "his right hand shall find them out;" and to his attendant angels he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me." Hear how God contemplates the judgments that await them: "To me belongeth vengeance and recompence: their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh^l." True it is, that these judgments have a primary reference to this world; but they shew how inconceivably awful must be the vengeance which he will execute on the ungodly in the world to come. Who can think of these judgments and not tremble? for "who knoweth the power of his anger?" and "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"]

SEE, then,

1. The importance of ascertaining your real character—

[If you will inquire who the wicked are, to whom this fearful doom will be assigned, you will scarcely find one: all hope that they are in a better state. But God will not judge us by the standard which we have fixed for ourselves, but by that which he has established for us in his Law and in his Gospel. To what purpose, then, will you deceive yourselves now, when you will so soon be undeceived, and reap the bitter fruits of your folly? O! turn to the Lord without delay; and never rest till you have received in your souls the favourable tokens of his acceptance.]

2. The blessedness of having God for your friend—

[If he be your enemy, the whole world cannot protect you from his avenging arm. But if he be your friend, who, or what, can harm you? As for man, he cannot touch a hair of your head without God's permission: and if he be suffered to assault you for a time, you shall have an ample recompence in the eternal world. Realize the idea, that God is governing the world, and will judge it in the last day; and then you need not fear what all the confederate hosts of earth and hell can do against you.]

^k 2 Pet. iii. 7.

^l Deut. xxxii. 35, 41, 42.

DII.

THE NAME OF GOD A GROUND OF TRUST.

Ps. ix. 10. *They that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee.*

IN reading the Holy Scriptures, we should not be satisfied with inquiring into their sense and meaning, but should mark very particularly the character of God, as set forth in them. In the sacred volume, the portrait of Jehovah, if I may so express myself, is drawn, as it were, at full length: so that, as far as such weak creatures as we are able to comprehend his Divine Majesty, we may form correct notions respecting him. Few persons ever enjoyed better opportunities for discovering his real character than David, who was favoured with such ample manifestations of God's power and grace. On what occasion he wrote this psalm, we know not. It is clear that he wrote it subsequent to his bringing up of the ark to Mount Zion, and before he had vanquished all the surrounding nations. But, from all that he had seen and known of God, he gives this testimony respecting him: "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee."

For the elucidating of these words, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What the knowledge of God's name imports—

It imports, not merely a knowledge of the different *names* by which he is called, but a knowledge of *him*,

1. In his own essential perfections—

[He was pleased to reveal himself to Moses in express terms, declarative of all his glorious perfections: "The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the *name* of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty^a."

^a Exod. xxxiv. 5—7.

But he had previously placed Moses in a clift of the rock in Horeb^b; which rock was a very eminent type of Christ^c: and I doubt not but that this was intended to shew, that in Christ alone he could be so viewed by fallen man. It is in Christ alone that all these perfections unite and harmonize; and in Christ alone can God be called “a just God and a Saviour^d.” Now, to apprehend God aright, we must have a view of him as revealed in the person of his Son, who is “the image of the invisible God^e,” the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^f.” It is in his face alone that all the glory of the Deity shines forth^g.]

2. In all his diversified dispensations—

[A view of God’s dispensations is *particularly marked in my text*, as necessary to a just estimate of his character: “They that know thy name will put their trust in thee: FOR *thou, Lord, hast not forsaken* them that seek thee.” In truth, it is from the history of God’s dealings with his people, far more than from any abstract descriptions of him in the sacred writings, that we learn to estimate his character aright. When did he ever forsake one who sought him? “When did he ever say to any, Seek ye my face in vain^h?” Never did he reject one mourning penitent, or abandon one who humbly and steadfastly relied upon him. His compassion to the penitent, and his fidelity to the believing soul, have never failed. From the beginning of the world has he been, in these respects, “without variableness or shadow of turningⁱ.” This we learn from the Prophet Samuel: “The Lord will not forsake his people, because it has pleased him to make you his people^k.” True, he may chastise his people for their offences; but yet he will not utterly forsake them^l. He may even “forsake them for a time; but he will surely return to them in tender mercy,” at the appointed season^m. His assertions on this head are as strong as it is possible for language to express. He has said to every believing soul, “I will never leave thee; I will never, never forsake theeⁿ.” Now, it is a view of God’s character in these respects, illustrated and confirmed by his actual dispensations; it is this, I say, which properly constitutes “the knowledge of his name.”]

Having ascertained what this knowledge is, I proceed to shew,

II. How it will evince its existence in the soul—

^b Exod. xxxiii. 19—23.

^c 1 Cor. x. 4.

^d Isai. xlv. 21. Rom. iii. 26.

^e Col. i. 15.

^f Heb. i. 3.

^g 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^h Isai. xlv. 19.

ⁱ Jam. i. 17.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^l Ps. lxxxix. 30—36.

^m Isai. liv. 7, 8.

ⁿ Heb. xiii. 5. See the Greek.

Beyond a doubt, it will lead the person, in whom it is,

1. To renounce all false confidences—

[Man, whilst ignorant of God, is always leaning on an arm of flesh. See God's ancient people, how continually were even they, notwithstanding all their advantages, trusting in the creature, rather than in God. To Egypt or Assyria they looked, in their troubles, rather than to their heavenly Protector^o. Indeed, there was not any thing on which they would not rely, rather than on God^p. But, when they were made sensible of their folly, and *had discovered the real character of God*, they instantly renounced all these false confidences, saying, "Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: *for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy*^q." The same proneness to creature-confidence is found amongst ourselves. Who does not, at first, rely on his own wisdom to guide him, his own strength to support him, and his own goodness to procure for him acceptance with God? But, in conversion we learn where alone our hope is to be placed, even in "God, who worketh all our works in us^r," and "in Christ, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption^s." This was the effect of conversion in St. Paul, who accounted all his former attainments to be but "loss for Christ, and desired to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which was of the Law, but the righteousness which was of God by faith in Christ^t." And the same effect invariably follows from a discovery of God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus.]

2. To rely solely upon God—

[Yes, indeed, "they who know his name *will* trust in him." See in David the confidence which such knowledge inspires. "The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want^u." See him when he goes forth against Goliath: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel^x." See him when all

^o Isai. xxxi. 1. Hos. v. 13. and vii. 11.

^p Isai. xxii. 8—11.

^q Hos. xiv. 3.

^r Isai. xxvi. 12.

^s 1 Cor. i. 30.

^t Phil. iii. 7—9.

^u Ps. xxiii. 1.

^x 1 Sam. xvii. 45, 46.

around him were reduced to despair: "In the Lord put I my trust; how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? for, lo, the wicked bend their bow; they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart: and if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" What? "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eye-lids try the children of men:" and, as he knows all their machinations against me, so he knows all my necessities; and will assuredly deliver me out of their hands^y. His deliberate sentiment, on all occasions, was this: "Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? (to any earthly powers?) From whence, then, cometh my help? My help cometh of the Lord, who *made* heaven and earth^z," and, therefore, is infinitely superior to both. Of St. Paul's confidence I forbear to speak, because that must of necessity occur to the minds of all who read the Holy Scriptures^a: but this I will say, that there is nothing more severely reprov'd, throughout the inspired volume, than diffidence and distrust; nor any thing more highly commended than faith^b.]

What, then, is my ADVICE to all? To every one amongst you I say,

1. Study the Holy Scriptures—

[From human writings you may learn *something* of God: but from the Scriptures alone can you acquire such a knowledge of him as it is your privilege and your duty to possess. In reading them, mark his every perfection, as displayed in his dealings with the children of men. If you notice *facts only*, you will read to little purpose: it is his glory, as beaming forth throughout the whole, which you are chiefly to contemplate: and, if your mind be habituated to contemplate that, you can never want a ground of consolation or of confidence in any state to which you may, by any possibility, be reduced.]

2. Follow the examples of the Scripture saints—

[In comparing the character of those who profess Christianity with that of the saints recorded in holy writ, one would be tempted to think that they were of a different species, and belonging to two different worlds: for really, if we heard of persons inhabiting one of the planets, they could not differ more widely in their sentiments and habits, than the nominal Christian differs from the Scripture saints. What, for instance, were St. Paul's *sentiments*? "I count all things but loss for

^y Ps. xi. 1—4. Bishop Horne's translation.

^z Ps. cxxi. 1, 2. The marginal translation.

^a Rom. viii. 31—39.

^b Jer. xvii. 5—8.

the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord." And what were his *habits*? "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Compare this with the great mass of Christians around us, and say what resemblance there is between them. Verily, if we will serve God aright, we must be followers of the Apostle, even as he was of Christ. As for the world's judgment, whether they will approve it, or not, we are not to regard it. We must approve ourselves to God; and both put our trust in him and serve him, as those who know they shall be judged by him in the last day. If we follow the footsteps of the flock, then shall we be numbered among the sheep of Christ, and dwell in his fold for ever and ever.]

DIII.

THE DANGER OF FORGETTING GOD.

Ps. ix. 17. *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.*

THE most eminent saints are represented in scripture as weeping over an ungodly world. Nor would this exercise of compassion be so rare, if we duly considered how great occasion there is for it. The words before us are a plain and unequivocal declaration from God himself respecting the doom which awaits every impenitent sinner. May God impress our minds with a solemn awe, while we shew,

I. Who they are whom God esteems wicked—

If we consult the opinions of men, we shall find that they differ widely from each other in their ideas of moral guilt, and that they include more or less in their definition of wickedness according to their own peculiar habits of life; every one being careful so to draw the line that he himself may not be comprehended within it. But God does not consult our wishes, or accommodate his word to our partial regards; he denominates all them wicked, who "forget" him. Doubtless there are degrees of guilt: but all those are wicked in his sight who are,

1. Regardless of his laws—

[These ought to be written on our hearts, and to be the invariable rule of our conduct. It should be our constant inquiry, What is duty? what does God command? But if this be no part of our concern, if our inquiry be continually, "What will please myself; what will advance my interests: what will suit the taste of those around me;" are we not wicked? Do we not in all such instances rebel against God, and become, as it were, a God unto ourselves? Yet who amongst us has not been guilty in these respects?]

2. Forgetful of his benefits—

[Every day and hour of our lives we have been laden with mercies by a kind and bountiful benefactor. And should they not have excited correspondent emotions of gratitude in our hearts? Yea, should they not have filled our mouths with praises and thanksgivings? But what shall we say to that greatest of all mercies, the gift of God's dear Son to die for us? Has not *that* deserved our devoutest acknowledgments? What then if we have passed days and years without any affectionate remembrance of God? What if we have even abused the bounties of his providence, and poured contempt upon the riches of his grace? What if we have "trodden under foot the Son of God, and done despite to the Spirit of grace?" Are we not wicked? Do we account such ingratitude a venial offence, when exercised by a dependent towards ourselves?]

3. Unmindful of his presence—

[God is every where present, and every object around us has this inscription upon it, "Thou, God, seest me." Now it is our duty and privilege to walk with God as his friends, and to set him before us all the day long. But, suppose we have been unmindful of his presence, and have indulged without remorse those thoughts, which we could not have endured to carry into practice in the presence of a fellow-creature; suppose we have been careless and unconcerned even when we were assembled in God's house of prayer; suppose that, instead of having him in all our thoughts, we have lived "without him in the world;" are we not wicked? Is it necessary to have added murder or adultery to such crimes as these in order to constitute us wicked? Does God judge thus, when he declares that they who are thus without God, are at the same time "without hope^a?"]

While we rectify our notions respecting the persons that are wicked, let us inquire,

^a Eph. ii. 12.

II. What is to be their final doom—

The word “hell” sometimes imports no more than the grave; but here it must mean somewhat far more awful; because the righteous go into the grave as well as the most abandoned—

Hell is a place of inconceivable misery—

[Men in general do not wish to hear this place so much as mentioned, much less described, as the portion of the wicked: but it is better far to hear of it, than to dwell in it; and it is by hearing of it that we must be persuaded to avoid it^b. Our Lord represents it as a place originally formed for the reception of the fallen angels; and very frequently labours to deter men from sin by the consideration of its terrors^c. And who that reflects upon that “lake of fire and brimstone,” where the wicked “dwell with everlasting burnings,” and “weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth,” without so much as the smallest hope of deliverance from it, and where “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever;” who that considers what it must be to have the devils for our companions, and to have the vials of God’s wrath poured out upon us, without intermission and without end; who that considers these things, must not tremble at the thought of taking up his abode in that place ?]

Yet must that be the portion of all that forget God—

[*Now* scoffers make light of eternal torments, and puff at the denunciations of God’s wrath; but ere long they will wish that “the rocks might fall upon them, and the hills cover them” from his impending judgments. But however reluctant they be to obey the divine mandate, they must “depart;” they will be “turned” into hell with irresistible violence, and with fiery indignation. Their numbers will not at all secure them against the threatened vengeance: though there be whole “nations,” they will not be able to withstand the arm of God; nor will they excite commiseration in his heart: neither will their misery be the less because of the multitudes who partake of it; for, instead of alleviating one another’s sorrows with tender sympathy, they will accuse one another with the bitterest invectives. The power and veracity of God are pledged to execute this judgment; and sooner shall heaven and earth be annihilated, than one jot or tittle of his word shall fail.]

INFER—

1. How awful is the insensibility in which the world are living!

^b 2 Cor. v. 11.

^c Luke xii. 5. Mark ix. 43—48.

[Men seem as careless and indifferent about their eternal interests as if they had nothing to apprehend; or as if God had promised that the wicked should be received into heaven. But can they set aside the declaration that is now before us? Or do they suppose it is intended merely to alarm us; and that it shall never be executed upon us? "Is God then a man that he should lie, or a son of man that he should repent?" O that they would awake from their infatuation, and flee from the wrath to come!]

2. How just will be the condemnation of sinners in the last day!

[Many think it a hard thing that so heavy a judgment should be denounced merely for forgetting God. But is this so small an offence as they imagine? Is it not rather exceeding heinous? Does it not imply the basest ingratitude, the most daring rebellion, yea, a great degree even of atheism itself? And shall not God visit for these things, and be avenged on such transgressors as these? Shall they be at liberty to abuse God's mercies, and God not be at liberty to suspend the communication of his blessings? Shall they despise and trample on God's laws, and God not be at liberty to assert their authority? Shall they say to God, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;" and shall God be accused of injustice if he say to them, "Depart; ye shall never have one glimpse of my presence any more?" But if they *will dare* to open their mouths against him now, the time is shortly coming, when they will stand self-convicted, and self-condemned.]

3. How marvellous are the patience and the mercy of God!

[God has seen the whole race of man departing from him, and blotting out, as much as they could, the remembrance of him from the earth. His authority, his love, his mercy, are, as it were, by common consent banished from the conversation and from the very thoughts of men. Yet, instead of burning with indignation against us, and "turning us all quick into hell," he bears with us, he invites us to mercy, he says, "Deliver them from going down into the pit; for I have found a ransom^d." O that we might be duly sensible of his mercy! O that we might flee for refuge to the hope set before us! If once we be cast into hell, we shall never obtain "one drop of water to cool our tongues:" but "this is the accepted time;" the Lord grant that we may find it also, "the day of salvation!"]

^d Job xxxiii. 24.

DIV.

MEN'S PROUD CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Ps. x. 4, 5. *The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God : God is not in all his thoughts : his ways are always grievous : thy judgments are far above out of his sight : as for all his enemies, he puffeth at them.*

PRIDE, when manifested in a flagrant manner, universally excites disgust ; so hateful is it, when divested of the specious garb in which it is generally clothed. But though all hate pride, when it appears in others, few are sensible how much it reigns within their own bosoms. In our converse with man, this evil disposition is ready to shew itself on every occasion : but in our conduct towards God, it is the fruitful parent of habitual neglect, and atheistical contempt. This is affirmed in the passage before us, in which we may notice,

I. The state of the wicked—

It is not easy to conceive a more humiliating description of their character than that given us by the Psalmist :

They “will not seek after God”—

[God invites them to seek his face, and promises that he will be found of them ; but they cannot be prevailed upon either by promises or threats : they will seek with eagerness an earthly object, that may make them happy ; but they account God unworthy of any notice or regard^a.]

“He is not even admitted into their thoughts”—

[It is astonishing to what a degree men often banish God from their minds. They will pass days, months, and even years, without one reverential thought of him, unless when they are alarmed by some awful providence, or awakened by some faithful discourse : and *then*, unless the grace of God prevent them, they will cast him out of their minds again as soon as possible, and drown their thoughts in business or dissipation^b.]

They account “his ways,” as far as they know them, “grievous”—

^a Job xxxv. 10.

^b Job xxi. 14, 15.

[When urged to devote themselves to God in sincerity and truth, they conceive that such a state is unattainable, or, at least, incompatible with the common duties and offices of life. They call the indulgence of their lusts, liberty; and the exercise of vital godliness, an intolerable bondage. Every part of the divine life is irksome to them, and *that* too, not occasionally, but “always,” without any change or intermission.]

The “judgments of God are far above out of their sight”—

[By the “judgments” of God we understand his word and works. Now these are not only out of their sight in some particulars (for in some respects they are incomprehensible even to the most enlightened saints) but they are altogether foolishness unto them^c. When the mysteries of redemption are opened, they are esteemed by them as “cunningly-devised fables:” and when the marvellous interpositions of Providence are insisted on, they are ready to exclaim, with Ezekiel’s hearers, “Ah! Lord God, doth he not speak parables^d?”]

“As for all their enemies, they puff at them”—

[If God himself threaten them as an enemy, they disregard his menaces. The denunciations of his wrath are deemed by them unworthy of any serious attention. They even puff at them with contempt and disdain. They quiet all their fears, saying, like them of old, “Tush, God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it^e:” “I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart^f.”]

In order to account for this state of things, let us trace it to,

II. The real source of their wickedness—

We might trace this practical atheism to men’s ignorance and unbelief: but the Psalmist suggests to us the true ground and occasion of it: it all arises from the pride of their hearts.

Men are *too good*, in their own apprehension, *to need God’s mercy*—

[They will confess that they are not altogether so good as they might be; but they do not think they deserve God’s wrath and indignation. Why then should they trouble themselves to ask for mercy at his hands, when they are in no danger of suffering his judgments?]

^c 1 Cor. ii. 14.

^e Ps. xciv. 7.

^d Ezek. xx. 49.

^f Deut. xxix. 19.

They are also *too strong to need his aid*—

[They imagine, that they can repent when they please, and that, whensoever they resolve, they can easily carry their resolutions into effect. If they thought that “without God they could do nothing,” and that “he must give them both to will and to do,” then there were reason for imploring his assistance: but, when they acknowledge no such dependence upon God, wherefore should they seek his aid?]

Moreover, they are *too wise to need the teachings of his Spirit*—

[They see, perhaps, their need of a revelation to discover to them the mind and will of God; but, when that is once given, they are not conscious that they need a spiritual illumination to discover the truths contained in it. They suppose their reason to be as sufficient for the investigation of spiritual, as of carnal things: and under that persuasion, they consider all application to God for the teachings of his Spirit, as enthusiastic and absurd.]

Finally, they are *too happy to need the divine presence*—

[They are occupied with carnal pleasure, and wish for nothing beyond it. If only they can have the undisturbed indulgence of their appetites, it is, to them, all the Paradise they desire. As for the light of God’s countenance, and the manifestations of his love, they know not what is meant by such things; they suppose that they exist only in the pretensions of hypocrites, and the conceits of fanatics.]

In short, like those of Laodicea, they possess such an imaginary sufficiency within themselves, that they have no need of God at all^g. And hence it is that they care not to have God in all their thoughts.]

INFER—

1. How astonishing is the depravity of human nature!

[If all be not equally addicted to gross sins, all are equally “without God in the world^h,” all have a “carnal mind that is enmity against Godⁱ.” Alas! What a picture of human nature! Let “every mouth then be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God^k.”]

2. How great is the change that takes place in conversion!

^g Rev. iii. 17.

ⁱ Rom. viii. 7.

^h Eph. ii. 12.

^k Rom. iii. 10, 11, 12, 19.

[The state of a converted soul forms a perfect contrast with that of the wicked. "Old things pass away, and all things become new." Let all then ask themselves, Am I now devoting myself to God, as once I did to the world; and despising the world, as once I despised God? This were indeed "a new creation¹."]]

3. How necessary is conversion in order to an enjoyment of heaven!

[There must be within ourselves a meetness for heaven before we can enjoy it^m. Let not those then who banish God from their thoughts, and cast off his yoke, suppose that they could be happy in heaven, even if they were admitted there. If they would find happiness in God for ever, they must attain in this world a conformity to his image, and a delight in his commandments.]]

¹ 2 Cor. v. 17.

^m Col. i. 12.

DV.

MEN'S CONTEMPT OF GOD.

Ps. x. 13. *Wherefore doth the wicked condemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it.*

THE thoughts of God respecting the nature and malignity of sin, are widely different from those which are entertained in the breasts of natural men. Men consider themselves as innocent if their outward conduct be not grossly reprehensible, and what they cannot justify in their actions they extenuate under lenient expressions; but God notices the very frame and dispositions of the heart: He clearly and infallibly interprets the language of men's thoughts: He declares that the wickedness of their actions proceeds from atheism in their hearts^a. Thus, in the psalm before us, he reveals the secret motives by which the wicked are actuated^b, and puts the right construction on their thoughts^c.

Let us consider,

I. The ground of this expostulation—

Were all the lineaments of our contempt of God to

^a Ps. xiv. 1.

^b ver. 2, 4, 6, 11.

^c ver. 13.

be drawn, we should scarce ever finish the dreadful portrait—

[We make light of the *Father's* authority, the *Son's* sacrifice, the *Spirit's* influence. Every *office* they sustain, every *attribute* they possess, every *relation* they bear to us, we disregard and dishonour. We overlook God's *providence*, we are unmindful of his *word*, neglect his *ordinances*, profane his *sabbaths*, despise his *people*.]

But, waving all other points, we fix our attention on that mentioned in the text, viz. *Our virtual denial of God's punitive justice*—

Men evidence by their lives that they think God will not require sin at their hands :

1. Their impenitence for their past sins shews it—

[They do not humble themselves for sin, or seek after a Saviour; and what is the language of this, but, “God does not regard, nor will require my sin?”]

2. Their unconcern about the prevention of sin in future shews it—

[They indulge all their evil habits, rush carelessly into temptations, listen to no admonitions, seek not God's aid, and even stifle their convictions; and does not this say, “Sin may be indulged with impunity, God will not require it?”]

Know ye then that this thought, or language of their hearts, is a contempt of God himself :

Of his holiness—

[Instead of regarding him as an infinitely Holy Being^d, it supposes him to be such an one as ourselves^e.]

Of his justice—

[The Scripture speaks of God as just^f, but this intimates that he is indifferent about the execution of his laws^g.]

Of his wisdom—

[The contriving of the plan of redemption was the greatest effort of divine wisdom; but this declares that the devising of it was superfluous, and that an attention to it is unnecessary.]

Of his mercy—

[God in infinite mercy offers us salvation through his Son^h; but this is a determinate refusal of his gracious offers.]

^d Isai. vi. 3. Hab. i. 13.

^e Ps. l. 21.

^f Deut. xxxii. 4.

^g Zeph. i. 12.

^h Isai. lv. 1, 2.

Such is the construction which God himself puts upon itⁱ—

II. The expostulation itself—

The question in our text is manifestly an indignant expostulation. I ask then,

1. What assurance has any man that God will *not* require sin?

[Supposing it possible or even probable, who can be certain of it? What folly then must it be to continue in sin through hopes of impunity, when the mistake, if it be one, will be irrevocable, and the consequence of it irremediable! We are bound, in common prudence, to choose the safer side.]

2. Has not God said that he *will* require sin?

[The testimonies to this effect are most indubitable^k. Can we suppose that God will falsify his word^l?]

3. Has not God *already* in many instances *required* sin?

[Have not individuals, companies, cities, nations, the whole world, yea, man in Paradise, and angels in heaven, been made monuments of divine vengeance^m? Why may he not manifest his indignation against us also?]

4. Will not the account be dreadful if he *should* require sin?

[No heart can conceive the terrors of the final judgment. Who, in his right mind, would risk the loss of heaven, and the suffering of hell?]

5. Can any power or policy of men *prevent* his requiring sin?

[Let us first avert death from our bodies, or provide an answer to Job's questionⁿ; "Who hath hardened himself against God and prospered?" Not earth and hell combined can prevent the punishment of one sinner^o.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us see how deeply we have been involved in this guilt. If our outward actions have been correct, still have we, to an incalculable amount, committed sin by our very thoughts. O let us flee for refuge to the hope set before us! Happy am I to declare that there is a way wherein a person may not only think this in his heart, but express it with his lips. If we

ⁱ 1 Sam. ii. 30. Rom. ii. 4.

^k 1 Cor. vi. 9. John iii. 3.

^l Numb. xxiii. 19. 2 Tim. ii. 13.

^m Jude, ver. 6. and 7.

ⁿ Job ix. 4.

^o Prov. xi. 21.

believe in Christ, God will never require sin at our hands^p; and to express it, so far from pouring contempt on God, will greatly honour him. God is not more honoured by any thing than the humble confidence of a believer^q. Let us all therefore lay our sins on the head of the true scape-goat, so shall they never be required of us in the day of judgment^r.]

^p Acts xiii. 39.

^q Rom. iv. 20.

^r Mic. vii. 19.

DVI.

THE WORKINGS OF UNBELIEF AND OF FAITH.

Ps. xi. 1—7. *In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, "Flee as a bird to your mountain: for, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart: if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness: his countenance doth behold the upright^a.*

THE Psalms are a rich repository of experimental knowledge. David, at the different periods of his life, was placed in almost every different situation in which a believer, whether rich or poor, can be placed: and in these heavenly compositions he delineates all the workings of his heart. He introduces, too, the sentiments and conduct of the various persons who were accessary either to his troubles or his joys; and thus sets before our eyes a compendium of all that is passing in the hearts of men throughout the world. When he penned this psalm, he was under persecution from Saul, who sought his life, and hunted him "as a partridge upon the mountains." His timid friends were alarmed for his safety, and recommended him to flee to some mountain where

^a The three first verses of the psalm should be read as one continued speech, just as they are here *printed*: then the force and spirit of the passage is made clear.

he had a hiding-place ; and thus to conceal himself from the rage of Saul. But David, being strong in faith, spurned the idea of resorting to any such pusillanimous expedients, and determined confidently to repose his trust in God.

Thus in this psalm we see, in a contrasted view,

I. The counsels of unbelief—

Unbelief always views the dark side of a question ; and not only keeps out of view those considerations that should animate and encourage the soul, but suggests others which are most injurious to its welfare :

1. It magnifies the difficulties we have to encounter—

[Doubtless the dangers which encompassed David were great and imminent: the arrows with which his enemies sought to kill him, were already on the string, pointed at him, as it were, and needing only to be drawn, in order to pierce him to the heart: the foundations also of law and justice were so entirely subverted under the government of Saul, that there was nothing to prevent the wicked from executing their murderous plots. But still there is no sufficient ground for that desponding question, “What can the righteous do?” Methinks the question under *any* circumstances is not only unbelieving, but atheistical: for if there be a God, and that God be a hearer of prayer, the question would rather be, ‘What *cannot* the righteous do?’” Let us look at an instance or two, as a specimen of what *one* righteous may do, even when, according to human appearance, the circumstances may be most desperate. The whole army of Israel is appalled at the sight of one gigantic warrior: yet a young stripling, with his sling and stone, destroys the giant, and puts to flight the whole army of the Philistines. Again: at a period when idolatry so prevailed in Israel, that Elijah thought himself the only worshipper of Jehovah in the whole land, one righteous man stems the torrent, destroys the priests of Baal, and demolishes all his temples and altars throughout the country. But another instance of singular importance is that of Oded^b; who, by his own unaided expostulation, liberated two hundred thousand captives, and constrained their victorious enemies not only to restore them to their homes without injury, but to treat them with a tenderness truly parental — — Shall any one, after such instances as these, and many others that might be mentioned,

^b 2 Chron. xxviii. 9—15.

ask, "What can the righteous do?" We should remember, that, as "with God all things are possible," so "all things are possible to him that believeth;" yea, "if we have faith only as a grain of mustard-seed, we may root up trees or mountains, and cast them into the depths of the sea."]

2. It prompts to the use of unbecoming expedients—

[However it might be proper for David to use prudential cautions, and not to put himself directly into the hands of Saul, it did not become him to "flee as a bird to his mountain," just as if he had no refuge in his God. His duty was, to repose a confidence in God, and to expect assuredly the accomplishment of all God's promises towards him, in spite of all the efforts of his most malignant enemies. But such is constantly the voice of unbelief: it bids us not wait God's time, but contrive some way for ourselves, lest peradventure God should have forgotten his engagements, or not be able to fulfil them. Thus it operated in Rebecca. She knew that God had designed the blessings of the birthright for Jacob, her younger son: but when she saw that Isaac's intention was in the space of an hour or two to give them to Esau, she conceived that the Divine purpose would be frustrated, if she did not instantly interpose for its accomplishment. To what a system of falsehood and treachery she had recourse, is too well known to need any recital: but it is a striking instance of the tendency of unbelief. And who does not feel this tendency in his own heart? Who has not at some unhappy moment sought, by dissimulation or concealment, to avoid the cross, which a more faithful confession of the Saviour would have brought upon him? But to use any indirect means either to avoid an evil or to obtain a good, is a certain proof of an unbelieving heart: for, "He that believeth will not make haste."]

In the noble reply of David to his friends, we behold,

II. The dictates of faith—

It is the peculiar province of faith to "see Him who is invisible;" and in all situations to have respect to God,

1. As an Almighty Sovereign—

[Mark the answer which David, with holy indignation, gives to his timid advisers: "How say ye to my soul, Flee?" How say ye with desponding apprehension, "What can the righteous do?" This is my answer to all such vain fears; "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven."

What plots can men or devils form, which God does not see? or what can they essay to execute, which he cannot defeat? He that sitteth in the heavens "laughs them to scorn." "He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot perform their enterprize;" yea, "he taketh the wise in their own craftiness." It is not possible to find a more beautiful elucidation of this subject than that which is recorded in the history of Elisha. When the king of Syria was warring against Israel, behold, all his plans were made known to the king of Israel; and were thereby defeated. But how were these secrets made known? Was it by treason? No: God revealed to Elisha the things which the king of Syria spake in his bed-chamber. The king of Syria determined therefore that he would kill Elisha, and sent an army to encompass the city wherein Elisha was. Elisha's servant, just like David's friends, cried, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" But, when God opened his eyes, he saw the whole surrounding atmosphere filled with horses of fire and chariots of fire: and soon afterwards he saw the whole smitten with blindness, and led by the prophet into the very heart of their enemy's country^c. Thus are all the saints watched over by an Almighty Power; and under his protection they are safe.]

2. As a righteous Judge—

[It may be that God sees fit to let the enemies of his people prevail over them: but their success is only for a moment: the time is near at hand when the apparent inequality of these dispensations will be rectified; when God, as "a righteous Judge, will recompense tribulation to those who trouble us; and to us who are troubled, rest." He *narrowly inspects*^d, not the actions only, but the dispositions also, of men, in order to render unto them according to their works: "the wicked his soul hateth;" and in due time "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest," even as he did upon Sodom and Gomorrha: yes, "this shall be the portion of their cup;" and they "shall drink it to the very dregs." On the other hand, "he loveth the righteous, and beholds them with delight;" and reserves for them a weight of glory proportioned to all that they have done and suffered for him. The believer is persuaded of this: whom then shall he fear? He knows that no weapon formed against him can prosper, unless Infinite Wisdom has ordained that it shall; and that no evil can be suffered to approach him

^c 2 Kings vi. 8—20.

^d "*His eyelids try*" as persons narrowly inspecting some very minute object, almost close their eyelids, to exclude every other object.

which shall not be recompensed an hundred-fold even in this life; and much more in that world where God himself will be the unalienable portion of all his people. How these views compose the mind may be seen throughout all the Sacred Records^e: and they will always be realized in proportion to our faith.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who meet with opposition in their Christian course—

[You are tempted perhaps by Satan, and by timid friends, to “put your light under a bushel,” instead of causing it to “shine before men for the glory of your God.” But you should say as Nehemiah, “Shall such a man as I flee?” No: my Saviour shunned not the cross for me; and, God helping me, I will gladly take up my cross and follow him — — Beware how you listen to flesh and blood, or attempt to reconcile the services of God and mammon: to “follow the Lord fully” is the only true way to present peace and everlasting happiness.]

2. Those who are ready to faint by reason of spiritual conflicts—

[It is doubtless an arduous task to “wrestle with all the principalities and powers of hell;” but, “if God be for you, who can be against you?” Do not, because of some occasional darkness, say, “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God:” but know, that your God is infinite both in wisdom and power; and that he is engaged to keep all who trust in him^f. Reject then with indignation the unbelieving suggestions of your great adversary: and, if for a moment he prevail against you, chide yourselves for your cowardice, as David did; “Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? HOPE THOU IN GOD^g.” Consider the force of our Lord’s reproof to Martha, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God^h?” The same then he says to us: let us therefore “never stagger at his promises through unbelief, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” Let David’s confidence be ours alsoⁱ.]

^e See Ps. vii. 10—17. and xxvii. 1.

^f Isai. xl. 27—29.

^g Ps. xlii. 11.

^h John xi. 40.

ⁱ Ps. v. 11, 12.

DVII.

PRACTICAL ATHEISM EXPOSED.

Ps. xii. 4. *Who is Lord over us?*

THAT “the world lieth in wickedness,” is a truth generally acknowledged. But it is by the more heinous acts alone that men in general estimate the wickedness around them: whereas in order to form a correct judgment, they should mark the alienation of heart from God which is observable, not in gross sinners only, but in the more moral and decent part of mankind. A spirit of independence pervades all ranks and orders of men: and though all do not live in the same measure of open rebellion against God, all have a standard of their own, to which to conform their lives; and, in reference to all beyond it, they say, as those in my text, “Who is Lord over *us*?” To illustrate this, I will shew,

I. The atheism of the heart—

Whether there be any who really believe there is no Supreme Being, I think, may well be doubted; since there is not an ignorant savage who does not imagine that there is some Being superior to himself, and some Being that taketh cognizance of his deportment. But a secret atheism abounds in every place; insomuch, that all who are yet in a state of nature will ask, “Who is Lord over *us*?” Who,

1. To inspect our ways?

[That this is the sentiment of the unregenerate heart is evident, from the declaration which is made in another Psalm, which the Apostle quotes as applicable to every child of man: “He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face: he will never see it.” And again, “He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it^a.” If persons were sensible of the divine presence, and that God marks every motion of their hearts, could they give such a latitude as they do to sin, or commit it with so little fear? No: if they are hid from the eyes of men, they are satisfied: and that which was erroneously imputed by Eliphaz to Job, is really fulfilled in them; “They say, How doth God know? Can he judge through the

^a Ps. x. 11, 13.

dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of heaven," unobserved of his creatures' ways^b.]

2. To order our paths?

[This is strongly exemplified in our text. "They say, With our tongue will we prevail: our lips are our own: Who is Lord over us?" It is painful to observe with what daring impiety men will "cast God's words behind them^c." Declare to them the commands of men, and they will have an ear to hear; but speak to them of the commands of God, and they reject it with scorn: they reply, in heart at least, if not in word also, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth^d." Pharaoh, it is true, was hardened beyond the generality of men: but his answer to Moses is still that of the generality amongst ourselves, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice^e."]]

3. To supply our wants?

[Whatever be the wants of an ungodly man, he will look to himself, or to the world, to supply them. He has no idea that God is observant of them, or will humble himself so low as to regard them. Now, this is a part of that same disposition which we have before noticed; and is no other than a denial of God. Job says, "If I have made gold my hope, or said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; this were an iniquity to be punished by the Judge; for then I should have denied the God that is above^f."]]

4. To call us to an account?

[Men imagine that what is past is all forgotten, and that they shall never hear of it any more. This is what the Psalmist so justly reproves: "They say, The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct^g?" Elihu, also, conceiving it to be indulged by Job, utters a similar rebuke: "Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him: therefore trust thou in him^h."]]

Now, though in none of these particulars, perhaps, will

^b Job xxii. 13, 14.

^c Neh. ix. 26.

^d Jer. xlv. 16, 17.

^e Exod. v. 2.

^f Job xxxi. 24, 28.

^g Ps. xciv. 7—10.

^h Job xxxv. 14.

men deny *in words* the interposition of Heaven; yet, *in their hearts*, they so far disbelieve it, that they act without any reference to it, and live, practically at least, as “atheists in the worldⁱ.”]

Let me, however, proceed to shew you,

II. The folly of it—

Foolish in the extreme is this disregard of God. For,

1. It will not alter *the state* of things—

[We may deny the agency, or even the existence, of God: but he will exist, and act too, in despite of us. We cannot reverse the order of created things: how, then, can we affect the Creator himself? He will sit on his throne, notwithstanding us; and will mark our conduct, and record it in the book of his remembrance; and call us into judgment for it, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. Now, if by denying these things we could change the course of them, then there were some reason for our conduct: but when we can alter nothing, but only deceive our own souls, it is little short of madness to continue in unbelief. In truth, we should call it madness if any man were to pursue such conduct in reference to earthly things. Suppose a man were to deny the tendency of bodies to gravitate towards the centre of the earth, and the power of fire to burn; and, in support of his sentiments, were to leap down a precipice, or thrust his hand into the fire; should we be at any loss how to designate that conduct? Yet would it not be a whit more infatuated than to go on in sin, on the presumption that God does not mark, or will not judge, the actions of men. In this case, precisely as in the other, we only rush on to our perdition.]

2. It will not alter *the issue* of things—

[We may declaim on the injustice of God, in consigning men to everlasting misery for the sins of time; or we may deny that there is any such place as hell. But it shall surely be the abode of the wicked, whether we will believe it or not. To judgment we shall be called: by our works we shall be judged: God's sentence shall be according to truth; nor shall we be able to withstand it. All that we do by our present unbelief is only to insure that very doom which now we presume to question. Then shall we find, that there is a Lord over us; and that we can neither elude nor withstand his power. If now we admit the truth of these things, we may avert the misery with which we are threatened, and secure the happiness which is offered to us: but if we persevere in an atheistical

ⁱ Eph. ii. 12. The Greek.

denial of them, nothing remains for us, but to learn from experience what we will not learn from reason or the word of God.]

Let me CONCLUDE with answering the question which is thus presumptuously proposed—

[Do you ask, “Who is Lord over us?” I answer, The Lord Jesus Christ is: and “he has sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess^k.” O that you would now submit yourselves unto him! What would he not do for you? What judgments would he not avert? What blessings would he not communicate? Remember, I pray you, that “He is God, and none else^l.” Whatever you may imagine, you can never “prevail” against him. As for “your lips being your own;” nothing that you have is your own. You are the work of his hands; and he has a right to every power that you possess. Yea, more, “he has bought you with a price,” even the inestimable price of his own blood: so that he has a double right over you: and you are bound, by every tie that can be conceived, to “glorify him with your bodies, and with your spirits, which are his^m.” Take him, then, as your Lord; and yield yourselves to him as his subjects: and then you may very safely ask, “Whom have I to fear?” Beloved Brethren, reject this Lord, and none can save you: give yourselves up to him, and “none can harm youⁿ.”]

^k Isai. xlv. 23.

^m 1 Cor. vi. 20.

^l Isai. xlv. 22.

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 13.

DVIII.

THE COMMONNESS AND FOLLY OF ATHEISM.

Ps. xiv. 1. *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*

MEN, who judge only by the outward appearance, are apt to entertain a good opinion of themselves: but God, who looketh at the heart, describes the whole race of mankind as immersed in an unfathomable abyss of wickedness^a. In confirmation of this melancholy truth we need look no further than to the declaration in the text. It may be thought indeed that the text is spoken only in reference to a few professed infidels: but the words immediately following shew that it relates to many, yea to all mankind;

^a Jer. xvii. 9.

“all being gone aside, and none doing good, no not one.” Above all, St. Paul, speaking expressly upon the subject of human depravity, appeals to this very passage as decisively establishing that doctrine.^b In considering the words before us we shall shew,

I. The atheistical thoughts and desires of the heart—

God interprets the thoughts and desires of the heart as though they were expressed in words; and he attests its real language to be like that in the text. It may be understood,

1. As an assertion—

[The name here used for God is not *Jehovah*, which relates to his essence, but *Elohim*, which characterizes him as the moral governor of the world. The words therefore must be understood, not as declaring that there is no God, but that there is no God who interferes in human affairs. It is true there are not many, who will deliberately affirm this in plain terms; but, alas! how many are there, whose actions manifest this to be the inward thought of their hearts! If we look around us, we shall see the great mass of mankind living as if there were no superior Being to whom they owed obedience, or to whom they were accountable for their conduct. They inquire constantly whether such or such a line of conduct will tend to their comfort, their honour, or their interest; but how rarely do they examine whether it will please God! How will men gratify in secret, or at least harbour in their bosoms, those lusts, which they could not endure to have exposed to the eye of a fellow-creature, while yet they feel no concern at all about the presence of their God! The language of their hearts is, “The Lord seeth us not, he hath forsaken the earth^c.” “How doth God know? can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of the heaven^d,” ignorant and indifferent about the affairs of men. And *as we thus refuse to acknowledge God ourselves, so we do not choose that any others should acknowledge him*. Is any one of our companions awed by the fear of God? how ready are we to laugh at his scruples; to propose to him the customs and maxims of the world as more worthy of his regard than the mind and will of God; and to encourage him in the hope, that such compliances shall never be noticed in the day of judgment! And what is this but to use the very language which God

^b Rom. iii. 10—12. ^c Ezek. viii. 12. ^d Job xxii. 13, 14.

imputes to us, "The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil^e?"]

2. As a wish—

[The words "There is" are not in the original, and may therefore be omitted: the text will then stand thus; The fool hath said in his heart, No God! that is, I wish there were none. And how common a wish is this! When men are fully convinced in their minds that God notices every transaction of their lives, and records it in the book of his remembrance, they are still unwilling to give up their lusts, and determined to continue in sin at all events. But are they easy in such a state? No: they shrink back at the prospect of death and judgment, and wish that they could elude the summons that will be given them in the last day. Gladly would they sleep an eternal sleep, and barter their immortality for an exemption from appearing at the tribunal of God. What satisfaction would they feel if they could be certified on unquestionable grounds, that God did not notice their actions, or that, notwithstanding he be the Governor and Judge of all, he hath decreed to bestow on them the favour of annihilation! Instantly they would exclaim, Now I may dismiss my fears; now I may take my fill of pleasure, and "drink iniquity like water," without any dread of future consequences. We may appeal to the consciences of all, whether such have not been frequently the thoughts of their hearts, or, at least, whether their dread of death and judgment do not justly admit of this construction?]

Such being the thoughts and desires of the heart, we proceed to shew,

II. The folly of entertaining them—

This will appear in a striking point of view, if we take into consideration the three following truths—

1. The thing wished for is absolutely impossible—

[God can no more cease to inspect the ways of men with a view to a final retribution, than he can cease to exist. As his superintending care is necessary for the preservation of the universe, so the continual exercise of his moral government is necessary for the vindication of his own honour. How absurd then is it to indulge a wish, when it is not possible for that wish ever to be gratified, and when the indulging of it makes us act as though it would be gratified! How much better were it to say at once, There is a God, and I *must* fear him; there is a judgment, and I *must* prepare for it!]

^e Zeph. i. 12.

2. If the wish could be obtained, it would be an unspeakable injury to all, even in this world—

[Men are led, even by the faintest hopes of impunity, to live in sin; and how much more would they yield themselves up to its dominion, if they could once be sure that God would never call them into judgment for it! This, *as it respects individuals*, would greatly embitter this present life. The gratification of their lusts would indeed afford them a transient pleasure: but who that considers how soon such enjoyments cloy; who that knows how many evils they bring in their train; who that has seen the effects of unbridled passions, of pride, envy, wrath, malice, of lewdness, covetousness, or any other inordinate affection; who that has the least knowledge of these things can doubt, but that sin and misery are indissolubly connected, and that, in proportion as we give the rein to appetite, we undermine our own happiness? And what would be the consequence to *the community at large*? Men, even now, “bite and devour one another” like wild beasts, the very instant that God withdraws his restraint from them! Who was it that overruled the purposes of a lewd Abimelech, of a covetous Laban, and of a revengeful Esau? It was God alone: and it is the same God that now keeps the world in any measure of peace and quiet. And if once the world were bereft of his providence, it would instantly resemble that world, where the dispositions of men are suffered to rage without controul, and all incessantly to torment themselves, and all around them. Is it not then the extremest folly to entertain a wish, that would involve in it such tremendous consequences?]

3. It would be productive of still greater evil as it respects the world to come.

[Doubtless, if there were no moral governor of the universe, there would be no fear of hell; and the thought of this would be a great acquisition to ungodly men. But they, on the other hand, entertain no hope of heaven; their brightest prospect would be annihilation. Melancholy prospect indeed! How much better, even for the most ungodly, to have a God to flee unto; a God to pardon their iniquities; a God to sanctify and renew their souls; a God to bless them with immortality and glory! They need not to wish for the cessation of his agency, or the extinction of their own existence, seeing that he is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him, and ready to receive returning prodigals. And is it not for the interest of all that there should be such a God? Is not the prospect of obtaining his favour, and participating his glory better than annihilation, more especially when the terms of our acceptance with him are so easy? He requires nothing but that we

should humble ourselves before him, and plead the merits of his dear Son, and renounce the ways that have been displeasing to him: the very instant we return to him in this manner, he will “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea,” and embrace us with the arms of his mercy. What madness then to wish that there were no such Being!]

INFER,

1. How great is the patience of God!

[God sees, not one only or even many, but all the world living without God^f, banishing him from their thoughts^g, and wishing him banished from the universe: yet he not only bears with them, but follows them with invitations and promises, and waiteth to be gracious unto them — — — Let us stand amazed at his goodness; and let that goodness lead us to repentance — — —]

2. How glorious is the change that takes place in conversion!

[Grace no sooner enters into the heart than it slays this enmity, and reconciles the sinner to God. Henceforth it becomes his one desire to walk with God, to enjoy his presence, to fulfil his will, and to live in the near prospect of participating his glory — — — How enviable is such a state! Compare *the wisdom* of such a state with *the folly* which we have been exposing — — — And let us instantly begin to live, as we shall wish we had lived, when we come to die.]

^f Eph. ii. 12.

^g Ps. x. 4.

DIX.

BELIEVERS VINDICATED.

Ps. xiv. 6. *Ye have shamed the counsel of the poor, because the Lord is his refuge.*

ONE would imagine that religion, as brought into lively and habitual exercise, should commend itself to all: it is so reasonable a service, that one would suppose none could find fault with it. Yet, never has it been maintained by any one since the first introduction of sin into the world, without provoking hostility from those who were not under its dominion. As for David, he suffered for it through all the reign of Saul, and through a great part also of his own reign: for, though a king, he was an object of

derision to all the scoffers in the land. Of this he complains in the psalm before us: for though it is probable that Absalom was the great instigator of the present evils, the people, too, readily sided with him, and exulted in the thought, that this despised monarch would now be destroyed.

The psalm, though primarily applicable to that occasion, was really, as St. Paul tells us, of a general import^a. And therefore, taking the text in that view, I will *explain*, and *vindicate*, the counsel that is here referred to.

I. Explain it—

The persons designated as “the poor,” are the Lord’s people, generally—

[It is certain that the great mass of the Lord’s people are taken from the lower walks of life. There are “not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble, called.” In the days of our Lord, it was “not the Scribes and Pharisees that believed on him,” but the poor—who were deemed accursed^b. “The common people heard him gladly^c.”

But the name is given to the Lord’s people principally because they are “poor in spirit^d,” feeling their utter destitution of every thing really good; just as a person in the state of Lazarus feels his want of all the comforts of life. In this sense the name is given to them in a great variety of passages — — — and throughout the whole world they answer to the character contained in it.]

They invariably “make the Lord their refuge”—

[They feel their lost and undone state — — — And in themselves they find no remedy — — — But in Christ they see a fulness and sufficiency, even for the very chief of sinners — — — They look into the Scriptures, and see the “counsel” given them, to “look to him,” and to “flee to him:” and this counsel they both follow themselves, and give to all around them — — — They determine, both for themselves and for others, to “know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”]

But this conduct exposes them to much obloquy. I will therefore proceed to,

II. Vindicate it—

^a ver. 2, 3. with Rom. iii. 10—12.

^b John vii. 49.

^c Mark xii. 37. ^d Isai. xiv. 32. and xxix. 19. Zeph. iii. 12.

In “shaming this their counsel,” the ungodly will pretend to reason with them—

[They will deride this counsel as *unnecessary*; since there is no occasion for them to feel any such alarm about their souls — — — They reprobate it as *presumptuous*: for, can they suppose that God should pay such *peculiar* regard to *them*, to accept *them*, sanctify *them*, save *them*; when all the rest of the world are perishing in their sins? — — — They pour contempt upon it as *ineffectual*: for to think of setting aside all good works in point of dependence, can be no other than a desperate delusion — — — Such are the arguments with which the ungodly will endeavour to shame the poor out of their confidence in God.]

But we will defend their counsel against all these unjust aspersions—

[It is *not unnecessary*: for there is not a creature in the universe that can be saved in any other way — — — It is *not presumptuous*. What presumption is there in believing God’s promises, and in obeying his commands, and especially that command of coming to Christ and relying on him for salvation^e? — — — It is *not ineffectual*: for there never was, nor ever shall be, one soul left to perish, that sought for mercy solely and entirely by faith in Christ — — — The cities of refuge afforded a safe asylum to him who fled from the avenger of blood: and, whatever have been the sins of the believing penitent, “he shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end^f.”]

ADDRESS,

1. The despisers—

[We need not go far to find persons of this character. In fact, *they* despise this counsel who do not follow it, even though they should never cast any particular reproach on those who adopt it — — — But, I beg leave to ask, what counsel will *you* give? Shall it be, to despise all religion? — — — or to rest in outward forms? — — — or to say, “Lord, Lord, whilst you do not the things which he says?” — — — You may boldly maintain this counsel *now*: but will you do it in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment? Know, assuredly, that you will be ashamed of it *then*, whether ye be now, or not. And that is the only wise counsel which will be approved of your God, and issue in your everlasting salvation. All else is but to “make lies your refuge, and to hide yourselves under falsehood^g,” or, in other words, to “build on a foundation of sand, what will fall,” and crush you under its ruins.]

^e 1 John iii. 23.

^f Isai. xlv. 17.

^g Isai. xxviii. 15.

2. The despised—

[What harm has it done you hitherto, that you have been despised by an ungodly world? Only seek your happiness in God, and you need not mind what man shall say concerning you. Man's judgment is but for "a day^h:" whereas God's judgment will be for ever. The Prophets, the Apostles, and our Lord Jesus Christ, were *they* approved of men? On the contrary, was there any thing too bad for men to say concerning them? Be content, then, to be "partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when he shall appear, ye may be glad also with exceeding joyⁱ." In truth, to be despised for righteousness' sake is your highest honour^k, and shall surely issue in your more exalted happiness^l.]

^h 1 Cor. iv. 3. The margin.ⁱ 1 Pet. iv. 13.^k 1 Pet. iv. 14. Acts v. 41.^l Rom. viii. 17.

DX.

THE BLESSINGS OF SALVATION.

Ps. xiv. 7. *O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord bringeth back the captivity of his people, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.*

ON what occasion this psalm was written, we know not: but there are two things which render it pre-eminently worthy of our attention: the one is, that, with very little alteration, it is repeated in another psalm^a; and the other is, that a very considerable part of it is cited by the Apostle Paul, not for the mere purpose of illustrating any point, but for establishing that doctrine which lies at the very foundation of Christianity, the universal and total depravity of human nature^b. The Psalmist has evidently been reflecting on the extreme wickedness of the human heart, in that men, for the purpose of prosecuting their evil ways without fear, would banish God himself from the universe^c, and, by impious derision, drive out all regard for piety from the world^d. Being oppressed, and overwhelmed, as it were, with this painful contemplation, he breaks forth into this devout rapture: "O that the salvation

^a Ps. liii.^b Compare ver. 1—3. with Rom. iii. 10—12, 19.^c ver. 1.^d ver. 6.

of Israel were come out of Zion! When the Lord shall bring again the captivity of Israel, Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad."

We may conceive him in these words looking forward, not only to the times of the Messiah, but to the Messiah himself, who is frequently designated by the name of Saviour^e, and who, under that character, comes forth out of Zion^f, and is an object of desire to all nations^g." But, perhaps, it is rather "salvation" itself that is here spoken of; and which the Psalmist contemplates,

I. As an object of desire—

And truly so it is,

1. To the world at large—

[View the state of the world, especially as it is described in the psalm before us — — — How inexpressibly awful! And how fully is this description verified in all around us! Respecting the Heathen world, we are willing enough to acknowledge the truth of the accusation: but, respecting the Christian world, we are ready to conceive of it as exaggerated and false. But St. Paul quotes these very expressions, to prove the wickedness of all mankind: and the smallest measure of candid observation will confirm all that he has spoken. Say, then, whether salvation be not needed; and whether the Psalmist's wish should not be the most ardent desire of our souls: "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" The Gospel brings precisely such a salvation as men's necessities require: and happy would it be, if its blessings were proclaimed to the utmost ends of the earth!]

2. To every heavy-laden sinner—

[Are any of you convinced of your sinful and undone state? Consider the remedy provided for you. O how precious should it be to your souls! How infinitely dearer to you than thousands of silver and gold! Great as your guilt undoubtedly is, it may all be washed away in the Redeemer's blood: and, fixed as your corruptions are, they may all be rooted out by the operation of his holy Spirit on your souls. Reconciliation is made for you through the blood of the cross; so that God, from being your enemy, is ready to become your Father and your friend: and, if only you embrace the

^e Isai. lxii. 11. with Isai. xlv. 21, 22. and in New Testament *passim*.

^f Rom. xi. 26.

^g Hagg. ii. 7.

salvation offered you in the Gospel, all the glory of heaven shall be yours. Cherish, then, this holy desire: and, in reference to your own souls in particular, be constantly saying, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!"

Realizing in his mind the object of his desire, the Psalmist proceeds to view it,

II. As actually attained—

Salvation has been effected by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: and,

Already has it produced great joy in the world—

[To a great extent has the captivity of God's Israel been turned. Thousands and millions, both of Jews and Gentiles, have been delivered from the power of Satan, by whom they were once led captive at his will. And what joy the deliverance occasioned, we well know. On the day of Pentecost, not less than three thousand, who had been pricked to the heart with a sense of sin, were, by the glad tidings of the Gospel, enabled to eat their bread with gladness and singleness of heart, blessing and praising God. And to this hour do all who hear the joyful sound experience the same holy feeling in their souls. Tell me, ye who have ever been released from the bonds of sin and Satan, have ye not been constrained to say, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour?" Yes, in every place where the Gospel comes, and in every bosom where it is received, is "the oil of joy given in the stead of mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."]

But what joy will it not excite, when it shall prevail to its full extent?

[There is a period yet future, when the Gospel shall be conveyed to all nations, and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God." Then shall the dominion of Satan be altogether broken, and the whole race of mankind be brought to "serve the living God." What joy shall prevail over the face of the whole earth! Truly the descriptions given of it by the Psalmist will fall infinitely short of the reality^h — — — for heaven itself will then appear to have come down upon the earthⁱ, and all the glorified saints to have descended to swell the chorus of the redeemed^k.]

From hence, then, we may LEARN,

1. What conversion is—

[Whatever mystical representations be given of it, it is simply this, "a turning of us from the captivity" of sin and

^h Ps. xcvi. 1—9.

ⁱ Rev. xxi. 2—4.

^k Rev. xx. 4.

Satan, and bringing us “into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” *This* it was for which the Saviour came into the world: and *this* it is which he effects, in all who are partakers of his salvation. Let any say whether it be not a proper object of desire, or whether a captive soul can ever desire it too much.]

2. What should be our great aim in life—

[The deliverance, to whomsoever it is vouchsafed, is only gradual: “the flesh will yet lust against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh; so that, to the latest hour of our lives, we shall not be able to do all that we could wish!” Even the Apostle Paul, after having served the Lord for twenty years, yet was constrained to cry, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me^m?” To grow then in grace should be the daily object of our ambition: and to “put off the old man, and put on the new,” should be the one labour of our souls: nor should we ever cease from this labour, until we have attained the full measure of the stature of Christ.]

3. What should endear to us the thoughts of death—

[Death will break all our chains, and set us at perfect liberty. Whilst here, we still are complaining that “we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins.” But no complaint shall ever be heard in heaven. There we shall be “pure, as Christ is pure;” and “perfect, as our Father who is in heaven is perfect.” Let us learn, then, to look on death as a friend, and to number it amongst our richest treasuresⁿ. That it is disarmed of its sting, is no mean part of our present joy: and that it shall translate us into the immediate presence of our God, is sufficient to make us pant for its arrival, “desiring to depart and to be with Christ, as far better” than the happiest lot that can be enjoyed on earth^o.]

^l Gal. v. 17.

^m Rom. vii. 24.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^o Phil. i. 23.

DXI.

CHARACTER OF THOSE THAT SHALL BE SAVED.

Ps. xv. 1—5. *Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned: but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to*

his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury; nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved^a.

IN the ministry of the Gospel, every subject must occupy that measure of attention which seems to have been paid to it in the Holy Scriptures. We must not be deterred from speaking of the principles of Christianity, because some despise them as *evangelical*; nor must we omit the practical parts of our religion, because others may discard them as *legal*. We should be equally ready to consider every part of God's revealed will, neither rejecting any, nor magnifying any beyond its due importance. The psalm before us is altogether of a practical nature. On what occasion it was written, we are not informed: but we think it not improbable, that it was composed after David had carried up the ark to Mount Zion, and placed it in the tabernacle. From that event, he would be naturally led to reflect on the character of those who would be approved of God in ministering before it, and, consequently, to depict the character of those who should be counted worthy to serve God in his temple above.

Agreeably to this view of the psalm, we may consider it as containing,

I. An inquiry into the character of those who shall be saved—

We must remember, that the inquiry does not respect *the way of salvation*, but *the character of those who shall be saved*. Had it related to the way of salvation, the great doctrines of “repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” must of necessity have been set forth: however they might have been expressed in terms suited to that dispensation, they could not possibly have been omitted. But the inquiry is simply this; What is the character, and what the conduct, of those who shall be finally

^a This psalm is one of those appointed to be read on *Ascension Day*; not because it relates to Christ's ascension, but because it drawn the character of those who, like him, shall be admitted into heaven.

admitted into that true tabernacle which God himself has erected in heaven? And can there be any inquiry more important?

OBSERVE,

1. What is implied in the inquiry itself—

[Certainly it implies, that *all* will not be saved. And this is a truth which our blessed Lord has confirmed beyond a doubt^b. Some dream of annihilation; and some of heaven: but what a fearful disappointment will multitudes experience! Yes: “fearfulness will surprise them;” and, instead of dwelling in the bosom of their God, they will “dwell with devouring fire, even with everlasting burnings^c.”]

2. What is implied in it as addressed to Jehovah—

[It is of Jehovah himself that David makes the inquiry: for it is Jehovah alone that can answer it aright. Man is partial in his own favour: and, even when constrained to acknowledge that there must be a difference between the righteous and the wicked, he takes care so to draw the line, as to include himself among the number that shall be saved. But God has no respect of persons: his word is fixed: and according to that word shall be the doom of every child of man.]

That we may with certainty determine the point, let us see, in this psalm,

II. Their character described—

The children of God are here faithfully described: they are distinguished by,

1. A principle of integrity in their hearts—

[It is the very essence of the Christian character to have righteousness and truth residing in the soul: we must be “Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.” Where a principle of integrity is wanting, nothing can be right. Services, of whatever kind, are of no account with God, if there be not a determination of heart to do whatsoever he commands. A single eye is that which he approves: and the want of it vitiates all that a man can do, yea, and renders it odious in his sight^d. We are aware that these assertions are strong: but they do not in the least exceed the truth. St. John’s declarations leave us no room to doubt: “He that doeth righteousness, is righteous, even as HE, that is, Christ himself, is righteous^e.” The object of the Christian’s desires, yea, and of his endeavours too, is universal holiness: he would in all things,

^b Matt. vii. 13, 14.

^c Isai. xxxiii. 14.

^d Isai. lxvi. 3.

^e 1 John ii. 4, 6. and iii. 6—10.

as far as possible, “be conformed to Christ,” “having the same mind as was in him,” and “walking in all things as he walked.” He would not willingly retain a right hand or a right eye that caused him to offend: his one labour and ambition is, to “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” It is in this way that he “puts on the Lord Jesus Christ;” and it is in this way that “Christ becomes all in all^f!”]

2. A corresponding conduct in their lives—

[The particular things enumerated by the Psalmist are for the most part overlooked, as though they were of minor importance: but, in truth, they enter deeply into the Christian character, and will serve as most decisive tests of the existence and measure of our integrity. In true Christians, then, the following marks are found:—

They abstain from uncharitable censures.—Amongst false professors, even as amongst the ungodly world, there is a lamentable want of tenderness to the characters of others: they will receive, and circulate, a false report, without ever considering how great an injury they do to him who is thus calumniated. They will suffer their minds to be prejudiced against a brother without any just occasion; and will even feel more alienation from him on account of some quality which they disapprove, than attachment to him for many qualities which render him worthy of their esteem. But the true Israelite will not deal out such measure to his neighbours: he will rather put a favourable construction on the things which admit of doubt, and cast a veil over the faults which are too plain to be denied. He will in this matter conform himself to the golden rule, of ‘Doing to others as he would have them do to him.’

They observe equity in estimating the characters of men.—They will not be lenient towards offences in the rich, which they condemn with severity in the poor; nor will they suffer their regards to be influenced by the pride of life or the prejudice of party. Magistrates, indeed, they will reverence as bearing an authority vested in them by God himself; but it is the office that they will reverence; just as Paul revered the high priest, notwithstanding the injustice with which he executed his high office: but the contemners of God will, *as such*, be pitied and condemned by every true Christian; and those who fear God will *on that account* be loved and honoured by him, whatever station they may fill, or to whatever party they may belong. He will from his inmost soul unite in the Apostle’s benediction, “Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.”

^f See Rom. xiii. 14. and Col. iii. 11.; which passages refer, the one to the *graces* of Christ, and the other to the *image of Christ in the soul*

They adhere strictly to all their engagements.—No Believer will think lightly of his word, and still less of his oath. If he have promised any thing, he will on no account go back, even though the performance of the promise should involve him in considerable difficulty. In all pecuniary or commercial transactions, his word will be his bond: no subterfuges will be resorted to, no equivocations, no falsehoods invented, to invalidate his engagement: if he have “sworn to his own hurt,” he will submit to the consequences, and discharge his conscience with fidelity. With respect to engagements of a yet more sacred nature, he will exercise the utmost scrupulosity; and not because of any change in *his own* mind, think himself at liberty to repudiate a betrothed object. If a great moral or religious change have taken place in *the one party* so as to change the character of that person, and to render him in fact a different person from the one that was betrothed, then *the other party* may justify a renunciation of the alliance (a man may justly rescind his engagements with a woman who shall depart from the paths of honour and virtue); but it is in the party who remains the same, and not in the party that is changed, that this right resides. Where there are no circumstances of this kind to absolve the Christian, “his yea must be yea, and his nay, nay.”

They abhor every thing that is sordid and unjust.—Usury was forbidden under the Mosaic Law; and that prohibition, *as to the spirit of it*, obtains equally under the Gospel. There is a *legal* interest of money which may fitly and properly be made: but every kind of extortion is worthy of the utmost abhorrence. To take advantage of the ignorance or the necessities of our fellow-creatures, to deceive them in relation to the quality or quantity of the commodities sold to them, to lean unduly to our own interests, and thereby to injure in any respect the interests of others; all this is contrary to the law of love, the law of honesty: and the man who for filthy lucre sake will condescend to such meanness, is unworthy of the Christian name. It matters not what profession of religion he may make, nor how high he may stand in the estimation of those who are unacquainted with his character; he has “the mark of the beast upon him,” and will assuredly take his “portion amongst the hypocrites.”

We are aware that many religionists will call this statement *legal*: but let them remember that Paul himself has given this very description of the Christian’s conduct, and has declared, that “those who are children of the light will walk in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth^g.” By these fruits must they be judged of, and “by these fruits must they be known.”]

^g Eph. v. 8—10.

In relation to persons of this character, we behold with pleasure,

III. Their salvation assured—

Our blessed Lord represents them as persons whose habitation is founded on a rock^h, and their stability is assured to them,

1. By the very graces which they exercise—

[We do not mean to say, that any man, however eminent, has in himself such a measure of grace, as shall be a safeguard to him under all temptations; for even Paul himself had not in himself “a sufficiency even to think a good thought:” nor can any child of man stand one moment longer than God shall be pleased to uphold him in his everlasting arms: but still God himself has represented “righteousness as a breast-plate,” which will resist the darts of our great adversary: and it must be obvious, that they, in whom there is a principle of universal holiness, and whose conduct is so strictly regulated by the commands of God, must be comparatively out of the reach of the tempter. In matters of daily occurrence, the Believer will still have within himself an evidence that he is a fallen creature: he will still be subject to mistakes, and infirmities, and falls; but he will not so fall as to return to the wilful practice of iniquityⁱ, nor so be moved as to “turn back unto perdition.”]

2. By the express promises of God—

[Were the Christian's stability to depend solely on the strength of the gracious principle within him, he would have but little hope of enduring to the end: but God has encouraged us to exert ourselves, and to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;” in the full persuasion, that “he will give us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” In the Scriptures, both Prophets and Apostles concur in giving us this assurance. *Isaiah speaks almost the very language of our text*: he draws the very same character almost in the very same terms; and then declares, that this person “shall dwell on high,” (even “in God's holy hill,”) that “his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks; that bread shall be given him, and his waters shall be sure^k.” To the same effect St. Peter speaks: he bids us add to our faith the practice of all social virtues; and then he tells us that “they who do such things *shall never fall*, (‘never be moved,’) but shall have an entrance ministered unto them abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^l.” How “exceeding great and precious are such promises” as these! How delightful is it to

^h Matt. vii. 24—27.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 9.

^k Isai. xxxiii. 15, 16.

^l 2 Pet. i. 5—11.

hear God himself engaging to “keep the feet of his saints,” and that “*the righteous* shall hold on his way, and that *he who hath clean hands* (the very persons described in our text) shall wax stronger and stronger^m!” Let this then stir us up to walk worthy of our high calling; and let us “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, *KNOWING that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lordⁿ.*”]

^m Job xvii. 9.

ⁿ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

DXII.

SUPERIOR BLESSEDNESS OF TRUE CHRISTIANS.

Ps. xvi. 4. *Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god.*

THERE is not, in all the writings of the Old Testament, a portion of Scripture that more fully attests the Messiahship of the Lord Jesus than this. All depended on his resurrection from the dead. And to this psalm both Peter, at the commencement of his ministry to the Jews^a, and Paul, on his first solemn mission to preach to the Gentiles, made their appeal as predicting the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day^b. In the beginning of the psalm, David speaks more particularly respecting himself: but even there he declares the blessedness of the Lord's people, and especially of those who were looking forward to the Messiah, beyond all the worshippers of false gods. And the contrast which he there forms will be the subject of our present meditations.

To elucidate it, I will,

I. Confirm the assertion in my text—

It is universally true that “their sorrows are multiplied that hasten after another god. It is realized amongst,

1. Pagans—

[They worship gods of wood and stone — — — And “their sorrows are universally and greatly multiplied.” The very instant they begin to feel a sense of guilt upon their souls, there is nothing so painful but they will do it, in order to

^a Acts ii. 25—32.

^b Acts xiii. 34—37.

conciliate the favour of their gods. The offering of human sacrifices, to which I apprehend the Psalmist refers^c, sufficiently attests this: and the self-devotion of those who, at this day, cast themselves under the wheels of the temple of Juggernaut, in order to sacrifice their lives to that detestable idol, places beyond a doubt the miseries sustained by idolaters, even where civilization is in other respects very considerably advanced — — —]

2. The votaries of this world—

[Look at those who are “serving divers lusts and pleasures,” and seeking happiness in the gratification of their own passions. Is the licentious fornicator, or the base adulterer, happy? No: they hate the light: they are ashamed to be seen in the pursuit of their unhallowed practices: and they contract a load of guilt, which, in hours of reflection, sorely oppresses their minds, and renders them afraid to meet their God. Even in temporal matters, the follower of forbidden pleasures often suffers to a great extent: and what he suffers in the eternal world, let the Rich Man, who disregarded the suit of Lazarus, attest. Truly, whether pleasures, riches, or honours be thus idolized, they heap distress and anguish on their votaries, both in this world and in the world to come.]

3. The followers of a legal and Pharisaic righteousness—

[This, too, is idolatry, no less than the indulgence of covetousness, lewdness, or any other corrupt propensity. And what a load, yea, what an insupportable burthen, does it entail! The Pharisees of old were far from happy: and so are the Papists now; for, whilst they have recourse to rites of man’s device, instead of seeking acceptance through the atoning blood of Christ, they put their own good works in the place of Christ’s, and accumulate to themselves sorrows without end. But what shall we say of the disappointment they will feel on entering into the presence of their God? They thought to purchase heaven: but the inadequacy of their efforts will instantly appear, and the impiety of their conceits be visited with suitable expressions of God’s merited indignation.]

Connected as this assertion is with all the following context, I shall be led to,

II. Contrast it with the state of the Lord’s people—

If it be true that “their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another god,” it is no less true, on

^c See the words following our text, which refer to the cruel and idolatrous usages of the Canaanites, the very names of whose idols were forbidden to be named.

the other hand, that their joys shall be multiplied that hasten after the Lord “Jesus Christ, who is the true God and eternal life^d.” Yes, verily, *they* shall greatly rejoice; as it is said, “Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice.” To them shall be vouchsafed,

1. Peace of conscience—

[This is unknown to any human being, except to him who believes in Christ. Others may have the insensibility of beasts, or the confidence of fanatics: but the tranquillity of mind which arises from a sense of God’s pardoning love upon the soul is altogether unknown to them. They possess it not. They cannot possess it, because God is not in reality reconciled towards them. There are no means of acceptance with God, but those provided in his Gospel: and, whether men are rejecting his Gospel as infidels, or substituting something else in the place of it, they are equally cut off from all hope of its benefits. But the Believer in Christ is fully accepted of his God: and, “being justified by faith, he has peace with God:” and he may say, with undoubting assurance, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and my cup^e.”]

2. Holiness of heart and life—

[Here, also, the Believer stands elevated above all the rest of mankind. Others may be fair as whited sepulchres: but the Believer is “renewed in his inward man,” and transformed into the divine image in righteousness, and true holiness.” And need I say what a source of happiness this is? The prophet tells us, that “the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever^f.” And to the same effect the Psalmist, speaking in his own as well as in the Messiah’s name, informs us: “I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope^g.”]

3. The prospect and possession of everlasting glory—

[He has a *title* to eternal life, and even *the begun possession of it* in his soul^h. Hence, in the language of David and the Messiah himself, he is privileged to say, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell: thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” As to the full enjoyment of heaven,

^d 1 John v. 20.

^e ver. 5.

^f Isai. xxxii. 17.

^g ver. 8, 9.

^h John iii. 36. 1 John v. 11, 12.

I attempt not to describe it. No words can paint it; no imagination can conceive it. But it shall be the assured and everlasting possession of all who believe in Christ.]

What, then, shall I say?

["Hasten after" this blessed Saviour, determining never to relax your diligence, till you have fully "apprehended him, and been finally apprehended of him." See what exertions the Pagans make, in order to please their gods of wood and stone. See, too, with what indefatigable zeal the worldling serves his gods, accounting his whole life little enough for the attainment of the object of his pursuit, whether it be pleasure, or riches, or honour. See also the self-denying exercises of him who is labouring to establish a righteousness of his own, instead of submitting to the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ. And shall any of these do more for their gods than you for yours? Shall not the Saviour of your souls be counted worthy of all that can possibly be done or suffered for him? I say, look at the earnestness of others in the service of false gods, and stand amazed at your lukewarmness in the service of him who has redeemed you to God by his own most precious blood. There is nothing which idolaters of all the different classes will not "give to their respective gods;" and let there be nothing withheld from your Lord and Saviour: yea, "give your whole selves¹" to him; and let your whole body, soul, and spirit, be sanctified to him, henceforth, and for evermore.]

¹ See the marginal reading of the text.

DXIII.

GOD HIMSELF HIS PEOPLE'S PORTION.

Ps. xvi. 5—7. *The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage. I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.*

THIS psalm is called "Michtam," that is, A golden psalm. And a golden psalm it is, whether we interpret it of David, or of Christ. To both it is applicable; to David, as a type of Christ; and to Christ, as so typified. In all the word of God there is not a passage on which greater stress is laid, as establishing beyond a doubt the Messiahship of Jesus; to whom alone the latter part of the psalm

can with any truth be literally applied^a. The former part of it, on the contrary, is much more applicable to David himself. The truth is, I apprehend, that David began to write respecting himself; but was overruled and inspired to speak things which he himself did not fully comprehend, and to declare *literally* respecting the Messiah, what was only *in a very lax sense* true in relation to himself. This we know to have been the case with the prophets generally: they were inspired to predict the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, whilst they themselves understood not their own prophecies^b. They spoke of one point which was uppermost in their own minds; and God overruled them to speak in language that was applicable rather to another point, which he had ordained them to foretell. Thus did Caiaphas the high priest, when advising that Jesus should be put to death^c: and thus did David, in this and several other of his psalms^d. We consider the words of our text, together with all that precedes it, as spoken by David respecting himself: and in them we see,

I. The blessed portion of God's people—

They have “God himself for their portion and their inheritance”—

[There seems, in this expression, some reference to the custom which obtained of sending to different guests, when assembled at a feast, such a portion as the Master of the feast judged expedient^e. But the principal allusion evidently is to the division of the land of Canaan by lot, and the assigning to all the different tribes the portion prepared for them. On that occasion the tribe of Levi was distinguished from all the other tribes in this, that whereas all the rest had a distinct and separate inheritance allotted to them, *they* had none; the Lord himself vouchsafing to be *their* inheritance^f. The sacrifices which from time to time were offered to the Lord were appointed for their support. Now, in allusion to this, David says, “The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.” He was not of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah: and

^a Acts ii. 25—31. and xiii. 35—37.

^b 1 Pet. i. 10—12.

^c John xi. 49—52.

^d Ps. xxii. xl. and lxix.

^e Gen. xliii. 34. 1 Sam. i. 1, 5.

^f Numb. xviii. 20. Deut. xviii. 1, 2.

therefore respecting him it could be true only in a spiritual and mystical sense: and in that sense it is equally true respecting every believer at this day. We are all "a kingdom of priests:" and we live altogether upon the great sacrifice, even the flesh of Christ, and the blood of Christ, which were offered for the sins of the whole world. By the very terms of the New Covenant, God, whilst he takes us for his people, gives himself to us as our God^g: so that all who believe in Jesus may claim him as their God." This, I say, is not the privilege of Prophets and Apostles only, but of every the weakest believer in the Church of God: for we are expressly told, that "*to as many as received him* Jesus gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believed on his name^h." The very instant they believed in Christ, the relation between God and them was formed, and God became their Father, their Friend, their Portion, "their eternal great Rewardⁱ." To us then belongs this privilege as well as to David; and with him we may say, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord^k."]

This portion too is secured to them—

[Israel in Canaan were surrounded with enemies on every side: but God, who had allotted to every tribe its portion, engaged to "maintain their lot." Even when all the males assembled thrice a year at Jerusalem, God undertook to be a Protector of their families and their possessions: and to this hour would they have enjoyed their inheritance, if they had not by their transgressions provoked God to forsake them. But *us*, who have HIM for our inheritance, he will not forsake: as he has said, "The Lord will not forsake his people; because it hath pleased him to make you his people^l:" and again, "I will never leave thee; I will never, never forsake thee^m." Not but that he will punish us for our transgressions; and so punish, as to make us feel what "an evil and bitter thing it is to depart from him: but his loving-kindness will he not utterly take from us, nor suffer his truth to failⁿ." It is not with us as with Israel in Canaan: they were left to forfeit and to lose their lot: but God, in his mercy, engages to preserve our inheritance for us, and us for it^o: and not only "never to depart from us, but so to put his fear in our hearts that we may not depart from him^p."

Such then is thy portion, O believer; and such is thy security that it shall be continued to thee.]

And is such the inheritance of all God's people? We shall not wonder then at,

^g Jer. xxxi. 31—33.

^h John i. 12.

ⁱ Gen. xv. 1.

^k ver. 2.

^l 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^m Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

ⁿ Ps. lxxxix. 30—35.

^o 1 Pet. i. 5.

^p Jer. xxxii. 38—40.

II. The feelings which they have in the contemplation of it—

Behold how David expresses,

1. His delight in it—

[All the pious amongst the Israelites would find some reason to be pleased and delighted with the portion that was assigned them. To some their proximity to the sea would be a matter of joy; to others, their pasturage; to others, their rocks and fortresses: so that all in their respective places would say, “The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” But how well may *they* adopt that language who have the Lord for their portion? Tell me, Believer, what else canst thou want? What can add any thing unto thee? What is there which thou dost not find in thy God? If thou possessest ever so great a portion of earthly goods, are they not all as dung and dross in comparison of this? Or, if thou art destitute even as Lazarus himself, is not all sense of indigence lost in the contemplation of thy better wealth? What the worldling has, he holds by a very uncertain tenure, and that only for a moment: but what thou hast is secured to thee by the promise and oath of God, and is to be enjoyed by thee with ever-augmenting zest for ever and ever. Say, Dost thou not, in this survey of thine inheritance, pity those who can rest in any earthly portion? Art thou not ready to weep over those as maniacs, who fancy themselves kings and emperors, whilst they are but little elevated above the beasts, yea, in some respects inferior to them; because they fulfil in a far less degree the true ends of their creation? Well indeed mayest thou exult when thou surveyest thy portion! When thou beholdest the sun and moon and stars, together with this globe whereon thou standest, and callest to mind, that the Maker of them all is thy friend, thy portion, thine inheritance; methinks it is almost strange that the contemplation is not too much for frail mortality to bear. To be lost in wonder, and be swallowed up in ecstasy, is no more than what may be expected of thee from day to day.]

2. His thankfulness to God for it—

[David clearly saw that of himself he would never have chosen such a portion as this. His earthly mind would have been as grovelling as that of others, if God himself had not “counselled him,” and discovered to him the vanity of all earthly good. Amidst the various trials which he had endured, God had drawn nigh to him; and in the night-seasons of affliction had instructed him, and had revealed himself to him in all his beauty and excellency and glory. Thus he had enabled David to make a fair estimate of the portion offered him, as

compared with that which the world around him enjoyed. In this view of the mercy vouchsafed unto him, David says, "I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night-seasons." And is it not thus with every believer? Do you not know assuredly, that of yourselves you would never have chosen God for your portion? Are you not well convinced, that you would "not have chosen him if he had not chosen you," nor "loved him, if he had not first loved you?" Did you not even hold out against his counsels for a long time, till he forced conviction on your mind, and "made you willing in the day of his power?" If you have been kept awake in the night-seasons, and "your reins instructed you," till with a compunction you were "pricked to the heart;" or, if you have been visited with trials that were necessary to wean you from the things of time and sense, do you not bless him for it, and for "the instruction which he then sealed upon your mind?" Yes; and with your whole hearts. You see in what a portion you would have rested, if these means had not been used to bring you to a better mind; and, if they had been a thousand times heavier than they were, you would now account them as unworthy of a thought, in comparison of the blessings, to the possession of which they have introduced you. I hear you adoring God, and saying, "I know that in very faithfulness thou didst afflict me:" for "before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy law." Go on, then, blessing and praising God; and never forget that "by the grace of God you are what you are."

To those who possess not this portion, I will "give a word of COUNSEL" in the name of the Lord—

[Survey the portion of the worldling, and see how empty it is. Look back on all that thou hast enjoyed, and see how little solid comfort it has afforded — — Then survey "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Think what it must be to say of God, "O God, thou art my God;" and of Christ, "Thou art my Friend, and my Beloved" — — Then turn to the Holy Scriptures, and see what counsel God has given thee there: "Wherefore do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness^r." Nothing does God desire more than to give himself to you for a portion, if you will but receive him. He complains, "Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life." "How often would I have gathered you, and given myself to you, but you would not!" Dear Brethren, let God choose your inheritance for

^r Job xxxiii. 15—20.

^r Isai. lv. 1, 2.

you: and he will be as much delighted to enrich your souls, as ever you can be to be enriched by him. Indeed by imparting himself to you, he himself will be enriched: for he regards you as his property, and says of you, "The Lord's portion is his people, and Jacob is the lot of his inheritance^s."]

To those who already enjoy this portion, I will offer a word of CONGRATULATION—

[“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he has chosen for his own inheritance^t,” yes, “Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord^u.” I ask not what you possess; or what you want: if you had empires, they could add nothing to you; and if you want bread to eat, it can take but little from you. Look at Paul and Silas when in prison, and their backs torn with scourges: their situation was to them as “the very gate of heaven^x.” So, if only you live nigh to God, and in the near prospect of the eternal world, you also shall be happy under all circumstances whatsoever. Imitate, for once, the worldling who is just about to take possession of his inheritance: with what joy he surveys it, and anticipates the delight which he will experience in the full possession of it! Thus go ye, and survey your inheritance. See the state of those who are now possessed of their entire lot. Behold how they feast in the presence of their God! Think, if you can, what God is to them^y: and know, that their bliss is yours, in all its fulness, and for ever. Think how you will then “bless the Lord for giving you counsel.” Live, then, now as persons sensible of their privileges; and say, as ye may well do, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, and I have a goodly heritage.”]

^s Deut. xxxii. 9.

^t Ps. xxxiii. 12.

^u Deut. xxxiii. 29

^x Acts xvi. 25.

^y Rev. xxi. 4, 5.

DXIV.

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION AND GLORY.

Ps. xvi. 8—11. *I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

IF the people of God had hope only in this life, they would be in a most pitiable condition; because

they are debarred by conscience from the pleasures of sin, and are exposed to a multitude of trials on account of their religion. But their views of immortality bear them up, so that the sufferings of this present time appear to them insignificant, and unworthy of any serious concern. The Psalmist penned this psalm under some deep affliction; which, however, lost all its force as soon as ever he directed his views to the eternal world.

But the words before us can scarcely be applied at all to David in his own person: they are spoken by him rather in the person of Christ, whom he typically represented; and to whom, in the New Testament, they are expressly, repeatedly, and exclusively applied. In this view they are a most remarkable prophecy relating to Christ; and they declare,

I. His support in life—

In an assurance of his Father's continual aid, he was unmoved by any difficulties—

[Various were the trials which Jesus was called to endure; but in all he preserved a perfect equanimity. When his sufferings were fast approaching, he spake of them without any emotions of fear^a: when dissuaded from exposing himself to them, he was indignant at the proposal^b: when warned of Herod's murderous intentions, he poured contempt on his feeble, unavailing efforts^c: when standing before Pilate's tribunal, he witnessed a good confession^d; and, alike unmoved by hopes or fears, informed his judge, that the authority exercised by him was both given, and limited, by a superior power^e. He saw God as ever present to succour and support him; and was well assured, that as nothing could be done but according to *his* determinate counsel, so *his* aid should be all-sufficient for him^f. Hence in the whole of his deportment he maintained an invincible firmness, a dignified composure. At all times he acted on the principles described by the Prophet Isaiah, and fulfilled in the utmost extent *his* prophecy concerning him^g.]

Nor need the weakest of his members fear, if they look for support from the same quarter—

[Many of God's people have experienced the very same support as was enjoyed by Christ. David's friends endeavoured

^a Matt. xx. 18, 19. ^b Matt. xvi. 22, 23. ^c Luke xiii. 31—33.

^d John xviii. 37. 1 Tim. vi. 13.

^e John xix. 11.

^f Ps. lxxxix. 21. Isai. xlii. 1.

^g Isai. l. 7—9.

to create in his mind desponding fears: but his confidence in an almighty Protector kept him steadfast^h; and determined him to preserve an undaunted spirit, however great or multiplied his trials might beⁱ. Paul also, in the view of certain and accumulated troubles, could say, “None of these things move me^k.” Thus may every believer triumph. The man who trusts in God is in an impregnable fortress, that has salvation for walls and bulwarks^l. If only our eyes be opened to see clearly, we may behold ourselves, like Elisha, encompassed with chariots of fire and horses of fire; and may laugh at the impotent attempts of men or devils^m.]

The more immediate scope of the prophecy is to declare,

II. His comfort in death—

Our blessed Lord submitted cheerfully to his death in a certain expectation of a speedy resurrection—

[Greatly as he was oppressed and overwhelmed with sorrow, he yet restrained not his tongueⁿ from joyful acknowledgments. His last discourses, and his intercessory prayer, abundantly testify the composure of his spirit, and the elevation of his mind. Look we for the ground of his consolation? we shall find it in those repeated expressions, “I go to my Father;” “Father, I come to thee^o.” He knew that his flesh, that holy thing formed in the virgin’s womb^p, and which he gave for the life of the world^q, should never become an abomination^r, but that, though immured in the silent tomb, it should be raised thence, before it could corrupt: and that his soul, though separate from it for a season, should soon be re-united to it, to be a joint partaker of the same kingdom and glory.]

Such consolation too have all his members in a dying hour—

[Christ rose, not as a private individual, but as “the first-fruits of them that slept^s.” And every one that believes in him may consider death as a sleep, and the grave as a bed whereon he is to rest^t till the morning of the resurrection. The bodies of the saints are indeed doomed to death and corruption on account of sin^u: but they shall be raised again, and

^h Ps. xi. 1—4.

ⁱ Ps. xxvii. 1, 3.

^k Acts xx. 23, 24.

^l Isai. xxvi. 1. Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

^m 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

ⁿ This is meant by “my glory” rejoiceth.

^o John xvi. 28. and xvii. 11.

^p Luke i. 35.

^q John vi. 51.

^r Christ’s resurrection on the third day was typified by that ordinance of the law, Lev. vii. 17, 18.

^s 1 Cor. xv. 20. ^t Acts vii. 60. Isai. lvii. 2. ^u Rom. viii. 10.

fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body^x: this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality^y. In expectation of this, the martyrs of old would not accept deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection^z: and, in the hope of it, we also may put off this tabernacle with joy, knowing that it shall be reared anew in a far better form^a.^b]

Connected with this hope in his death, we behold,

III. His prospect in eternity—

The state to which Jesus was to rise was a state of inconceivable and endless glory—

[No sooner were death and the grave vanquished by Jesus in the resurrection, and he was thereby “declared to be the Son of God with power,” than the way to the regions of glory was opened to him; that way, which, with myriads of attendant angels, he trod soon afterwards, that he might receive all the fruits of his victorious death. Then sat he down at the right hand of his Father, not any more to taste a cup of sorrow, but to possess a fulness and perpetuity of unutterable joy. Blessed prospect! well might he be animated by it in the midst of all his trials; and, for the joy set before him, endure the cross, and despise the shame^b.]

Such too are the delightful prospects of all his saints—

[They see, in the death and resurrection of Christ, the way to heaven opened: and, if they look to him as the resurrection and the life^c, a fulness and perpetuity of joy awaits them also at their departure hence. Who can conceive what happiness they will feel in the vision and fruition of their God^d? Well may they long “to depart; that they may be with Christ;” and account all their afflictions light and momentary, in the view of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which they will be crowned in the day of the Lord Jesus^e.]

INFER,

1. What rich sources of consolation does faith open to believers under all their troubles!

[Faith beholds God always present, always active, to succour his people: it looks forward also to the future state both of body and soul, enabling us to weigh the concerns of time and eternity in the scale together, and thereby to see the vanity of

^x Phil. iii. 21.

^y 1 Cor. xv. 53, 54.

^z Heb. xi. 35.

^a 2 Cor. v. 1, 2.

^b Heb. xii. 2.

^c John xi. 25, 26.

^d Rev. xxi. 3, 4, 21, 22.

^e 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

the one in comparison of the other. To be happy, therefore, we must live by faith.]

2. How certain is the salvation of those who believe in Christ!

[If Jesus be the Messiah, and have in himself a sufficiency for the salvation of his people, then have we nothing to do but to believe in him. But St. Peter, quoting the entire text, infers from it the certainty of his Messiahship^f; and St. Paul, referring to the same, infers his sufficiency to save his people^g. Let us then make him our refuge, our foundation, and our ALL.]

^f Acts ii. 25—28, and 36. ^g Acts xiii. 35—37, and 38, 39.

DXV.

THE MAN OF GOD.

Ps. xvii. 15. *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.*

IN respect of outward appearance, there is but little difference between “the man of God,” and “the men of this world” — — — But, in their inward principle, they are as far asunder as light from darkness. The Psalmist here contrasts them,

I. In their desires—

The men of this world affect only the things of time and sense—

[“They have their portion in this life.” Pleasure, riches, honour, are the great objects on which their affections are set, and in the attainment of which they suppose happiness to consist. For these they labour with incessant care: and if they may but transmit this portion in rich abundance to their children, they bless themselves, as having well discharged the offices of life — — —]

The man of God has his affection set rather upon things invisible and eternal—

[There is a remarkable *decision* manifest in that expression, “As for me,” I will do so and so. It resembles the determination of Joshua; who, if all Israel should forsake the Lord, declared this to be his fixed resolution, “*As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”]

In that other expression, too, “I will behold thy face in righteousness,” there is, I think, a peculiar delicacy and beauty.

It is not merely "I will seek thy favour," or, "I will follow after righteousness;" but I will seek thy favour in the only way in which it can ever be obtained, namely, in an entire compliance with thy holy will, as revealed in thy blessed word. In this view it imports, "I will seek thy favour in the way of *penitential sorrow*; for how shall an impenitent sinner ever find acceptance with thee? — — — "I will seek it in a way of *believing confidence*:" for thou art never more pleased than when a perfect reliance is placed on thy dear Son, and in "thy promises, which in him are yea, and in him Amen" — — — "I will seek it in a way of *incessant watchfulness*:" for if I practise iniquity in my life, or "regard it in my heart," thou canst never receive me to mercy — — — "I will seek it also in a way of *universal holiness*:" for it is the obedient soul alone on which thou canst ever look with complacency and delight — — —

We mean not to say that "the man of God is perfect;" for there is yet much imperfection cleaving to him: but we do say, that, in the habitual desires and purposes of his soul, he accords with the description here given.]

Nor do the two characters differ less,

II. In their prospects—

"The men of this world" can hope for nothing but *disappointment*—

[Admitting that they attain the summit of their ambition, they only grasp a shadow. Possess what they may, they feel an aching void, a secret something unpossessed: "In the midst of their sufficiency they are in straits." As for an eternal state, they do not even like to think of it: their happiness depends on banishing it from their thoughts; and if at any time it obtrude itself upon their minds, it brings a cloud over their brightest prospects, and casts a damp over their richest enjoyments — — —]

Not so "the man of God:" his pursuits are productive of the most solid *satisfaction*—

[Even in this life he has a portion which he accounts better than ten thousand worlds: so that in him is fulfilled what our blessed Lord has spoken, "He that cometh to me, shall never hunger; and he that believeth in me, shall never thirst." He has gained a superiority to earthly things, which no other man, whatever he may boast, is able to attain — — — But when, at the resurrection of the just, he shall "awake" to a new and heavenly state, how rich will be his satisfaction *then*! Then will he "behold God face to face:" then, too, will he have attained God's perfect image in his soul: and then

will he possess all the glory and felicity of heaven. Could we but follow him into the presence of his God, and behold him in the full enjoyment of all that he here desired and pursued, methinks we should every one of us adopt the Psalmist's determination, and say, "*As for me*, this shall be my one desire, my uniform endeavour, and the one great object of my whole life" — — —]

OBSERVE,

1. How wise is the Christian's choice !

[The world may deride it as folly, if they will : but I appeal to every man who possesses the least measure of common sense, whether he do not in his heart approve the very things which with his lips he ventures to condemn? Yes ; there is not one, however averse he may be to live the Christian's life, who does not wish to "*die his death* ;" nor one, however he may dislike the Christian's *way*, who does not wish, if it were possible, to resemble him in his *end*. Let it be a fixed principle, then, in all your minds, that "the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom ; and to depart from evil is understanding" — — —]

2. How happy is the Christian's way !

[Because the Christian renounces the vanities of the world, those who have no other source of happiness than the world, imagine that he is deprived of all his pleasures. But we might as well represent a philosopher as robbed of his happiness, because he has ceased to amuse himself with the trifles which pleased him in the years of childhood. The Christian has lost his taste for the vanities which he has renounced : "Whilst he was a child, he occupied himself as a child : but when he became a man, he put away childish things." He now has other pursuits, and other pleasures, more worthy of his advanced age, and more becoming his enlarged mind. When the question is asked, "Who will shew us any good?" His answer is, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me !" Know ye then, Brethren, that, however deeply the Christian may mourn over his short-comings and defects, and however ill he may be treated by an ungodly world, he is incomparably happier than any ungodly man can be. What says our blessed Lord to "the poor, the mourners, the meek, the pure, the righteous? Blessed, blessed, blessed, are ye all." On the contrary, upon "the rich, the full, the gay, he denounces nothing but woe, woe, woe." Be assured, then, that *they only* are blessed who seek the Lord ; and that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward" — — —]

DXVI.

GOD THE ALL-SUFFICIENT PORTION OF HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. xviii. 1—3. *I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

FROM the persecutions of God's saints in former ages, we derive this most important benefit: we see what was the power of divine grace in them for their support, and what its efficacy was to purify and exalt their souls. Had David never been oppressed by Saul, and never been driven from his throne by Absalom, what loss should we have sustained, in those devout compositions which were written in the midst of his trials, and which have brought down to us all the workings of his mind under them! In truth, no one can understand the Psalms of David, so as to enter into the spirit of them, unless he have been called, in some considerable degree, to suffer for righteousness' sake. The psalm before us was penned by David as an acknowledgment of the deliverances that had been vouchsafed to him from the hands of Saul, and of all his other enemies. And a sublimer composition can scarcely be found, in all the records of antiquity.

In the words which we have just read, we see,

I. An ebullition of his gratitude—

His mind was evidently full of his subject. He had been contemplating the wonderful goodness of God to him: and he bursts forth into this devout rapture: "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength!" Commentators have observed, that the word which is here used, expresses all that is tender and affectionate, and implies in it the strongest emotion of the soul. And this was justly called forth by his view of the divine perfections, and by his sense of God's unbounded kindness towards him.

And if he, from a sense of temporal mercies, was so inflamed with love to God, what should not we feel towards our incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ, in a review of all the wonders of Redeeming Love?

[View the Saviour in his personal excellencies; and then say what should be our feelings towards him — — — View him in the offices which he has sustained for us, as the Prophet, Priest, and King of his church; and then think what are the ejaculations which become you — — — View him in the blessings you have already experienced at his hands; and, whilst you adopt the language of the prophet, “In the Lord have I righteousness and strength,” tell me with what frame of mind you should utter these words — — — It is said, that, “not having seen him, we nevertheless love him; and that, believing in him, we rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified:” and sure I am, that the glorified saints around the throne should scarcely exceed us in the ardour of our affections, whilst we exclaim, “Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” In this, then, the Psalmist should be a pattern to us. We should be so in the habit of contemplating the Saviour’s love, that the involuntary ebullition of our minds should be, “*I do love thee, and I will love thee, O Lord, my strength; yea, I will love thee with all the powers of my soul.*” This, I say, should be the language of our souls, when our feelings, too big for utterance, can at last find vent in words.]

In connexion with this rapturous exclamation we have,

II. A profession of his faith—

David, from diversified trials, was forced to become a man of war; and to seek, by a mixture of courage and of skill, a deliverance from his enemies. Under the persecutions of Saul especially, he had recourse to strong holds and fortresses, where he might withstand his too powerful oppressor. But it was in God alone that he really found protection. As *means*, he had availed himself of local advantages, and personal courage, and armour both of a defensive and offensive kind: but it was God alone who had rendered them effectual for his preservation; and therefore he gives all the glory to God, saying, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler (to defend

me), and the horn of my salvation (by whom I thrust down all my enemies), and my high tower."

And shall not we, who have so much stronger enemies to contend with, acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as standing in all these relations to us for our salvation?

[Yes, in truth, long since had our great adversary the devil prevailed against us, if our adorable Emmanuel had not interposed for our deliverance. In him we have found refuge from all the curses of God's broken law — — — By him have we been strengthened in our inner man — — — And from him have we received the armour of heavenly temper, by which we have been enabled to maintain our conflict with all the enemies of our salvation — — — If we have been "strong, it has been in the Lord, and in the power of his might;" and it is he that must have all the glory of our preservation.

Behold, then, in what terms we should give glory to our great deliverer! We should acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as our "all in all." And, whilst we give him the glory of all that we have already received, we should trust him for all our future conflicts: and, contemplating fully all the powers that there are in him, we should learn to appropriate all of them to ourselves, and to say, "He is MY rock, and MY fortress, and MY deliverer; MY God, MY strength, in whom I will trust; MY buckler, and the horn of MY salvation, and MY high tower." There should not be any thing in the Lord Jesus Christ but we should make it *our own* by faith, and claim it as *our own* in all the conflicts to which we may be called: and in every time of trial we should address him in the words of Thomas, "MY Lord, and MY God."]

To this the blessed Psalmist adds,

III. A declaration of his purpose—

He did not think that God's relation to him would justify remissness or negligence on his part. On the contrary, he regarded it as *his encouragement* to call upon the Lord, and as *a pledge to him* of certain success.

And we, too, must bear in mind, that all our mercies must be obtained by prayer; and that *in no other way can we hope to be saved* from our enemies.

[We see how David prayed in a time of great trial: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help. Draw out also

the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me : say unto my soul, I am thy salvation^a.” It was thus that he brought down succour from on high, in every time of need. And it is in the same way that we must obtain help of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Though his promises to us are so free and full, yet “he will be inquired of, to do these things for us^b :” and “if we ask not, neither shall we have.” Moreover, we must acknowledge him in all that we have already received, and confess him as “worthy to be praised :” for the command is, “In every thing, by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God : and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” It is in this way alone that victory can be secured : but if we use these means, we are certain to obtain it. If we live in the habit of fervent and believing prayer, we may, in the midst of conflicts, exult as “more than conquerors ;” and behold, by anticipation, our great adversary as already “bruised under our feet^c.”]

From this sublime passage we may see,

1. The true nature of vital religion—

[Vital religion is not wholly speculative, nor is it altogether practical ; but a compound, if I may so say, of theory and of practice. We must have knowledge, even a knowledge of God in all his perfections, and of the Lord Jesus Christ in all his offices. Without this, there can be no right feeling towards the Supreme Being : no love towards him, no confidence in him, no communion with him. But, with just views of the Deity, we must also have suitable dispositions towards him. In a word, we must have an experience similar to that of David in our text, affecting from our inmost souls a life of communion with God, of dependence on him, and of devotedness to his service. Beloved Brethren, rest not in any thing short of this. Let your meditations on God be sweet and frequent : and let them be renewed, till they have kindled a flame of love in your souls towards him, and till the daily language of your heart be, “Bless the Lord, O my soul : and all that is within me, bless his holy name.”]

2. The folly of those who seek not after God—

[Compare the Psalmist’s experience with your own : What refuge have you in a time of trouble, or what comfort in reflecting upon God ? Alas ! instead of the blessed language of David, you must rather say, “O God, I behold nothing in thee that I can appropriate to myself ; nothing but what may

^a Ps. xxxv. 1—3.

^b Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^c Rom. xvi. 20.

well fill me with alarm and terror." As for love to God, you know not what it means : and for confidence in him you have not the smallest ground : no, nor have you any access to him in the hour of necessity. Hence you are a prey to your enemies, and "are led captive by the devil at his will." Unhappy creatures ! You may go on your appointed time, and may hide yourselves from the danger to which you are exposed : but your state is only the more pitiable in proportion as you are lulled in fatal security. If they are right who resemble the Psalmist, you can have no clearer evidence that you yourselves are out of the way of peace and salvation. And were there no future state of existence, your loss would be great even in this world : but when we take eternity into the account, your prospect is terrible indeed : for, if you do not love God now, you cannot love him when you go hence : if you do not possess an interest in him here, you can have no interest in him hereafter : if you do not live nigh to him in prayer in this world, you never can unite with the heavenly hosts in their songs of praise to him in the eternal world.]

DXVII.

BESETTING SINS.

Ps. xviii. 23. *I kept myself from mine iniquity.*

NOTHING is a richer source of comfort to any man than the testimony of his own conscience that he has acted right : for, if our own heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God. St. Paul enjoyed this in a pre-eminent degree : "Our rejoicing," says he, "is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world^a." And, in the whole of his conduct towards Saul, David could appeal to God himself, that he had demeaned himself as a loyal subject, and had rendered nothing but good for all the evil that he had received at his hands. "They," Saul and his followers, "prevented me in the day of my calamity : but the Lord was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place : he delivered me, because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded

^a 2 Cor. i. 12.

me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord; and have not wickedly departed from my God. For all his judgments were before me; and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also upright before him, and I kept myself from *mine iniquity*."

It is my intention to inquire,

I. What is that iniquity which we may properly call *our own*?

There are in every individual of our fallen race the seeds of all sin. But, as in different soils some plants will flourish more than others, so in different men are different propensities, which, growing to maturity, become prominent and characteristic features of the different individuals. There is, more or less, in every one some "sin which more easily besets him^b;" and which, therefore, may be justly called *his own*, as having taken the fuller possession of his soul, and as serving to distinguish him from others. That may be called *our own*,

1. To which, *from outward circumstances*, we are most *exposed*—

[This I suppose to be the precise case with David in my text. He was persecuted by Saul with most unrelenting cruelty: and was strongly tempted, both by his friends and by a regard for his own safety, to avail himself of the opportunities which were afforded him of destroying his enemy^c. Now, *by birth and education*, men are exposed to widely different temptations; as Agur intimated, when he prayed, "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches: feed me with food convenient for me; lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain^d." Men also are subjected to evils incidental to their *different vocations in life*. Those who move in a higher sphere, under the influence of proud and ambitious thoughts, are led to seek their own advancement at the expense of others. Those of the middling classes, who are engaged in mercantile transactions, are but too

^b Heb. xii. 1.

^c 1 Sam. xxiv. 2—15. and xxvi. 6—12.

^d Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

prone to indulge an inordinate desire of wealth: whilst those of the lowest rank are apt to yield to the unhallowed emotions of murmuring and discontent. When John the Baptist saw persons of different vocations coming to his baptism, he particularly adverted to their respective occupations, to guard them against the evils incident to each; warning the publicans against exaction, and the soldiers against rapacity^e; and thus shewing how all, in every department of life, are bound to watch against the sins to which their peculiar callings more immediately expose them. From *our connexions and relations in life* we also are subjected to many evils which tend to form and fix our character. Are we surrounded by those who are gay and dissipated? we are apt to contract a taste for gaiety and folly. Are our nearest relations worldly, carnal, covetous, ambitious? we are apt to drink into their spirit, and to be greatly influenced by their example: as it is said of Joram, king of Judah, "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab: *FOR the daughter of Ahab was his wife*; and he did evil in the sight of the Lord^f."]

2. To which, *from inward dispositions*, we are most *inclined*—

[Even in the earliest infancy there will be found widely different dispositions in children of the same parents: and as the children grow up to manhood, these form, in a very great degree, their distinctive characters through life. Doubtless these dispositions may be abated in some, and strengthened in others, according to the occasions that may arise for their nourishment or suppression: they may also vary with the different periods of their life. But, whatever be a man's leading disposition, it will expose him to temptation, and he will be likely to be betrayed into sin by means of those things which are calculated to gratify his peculiar desire. In other matters he may maintain a blameless deportment; or, if he have erred, may easily renounce his errors: but on the side of his darling lust he will be in danger of falling; even as Herod, who would obey in many respects the admonitions of John the Baptist^g, but, when called to put away his beloved Herodias, would rather sacrifice the life of his Monitor than comply with his advice? Let the besetting propensity be what it may, on that side will be our danger, and the sin arising from it is that which we need to guard against as most peculiarly our own.]

3. To which, *from habit*, we are most *addicted*—

[Habit is, indeed, a second nature; and an Ethiopian may as easily change his skin, or a leopard his spots, as we can put

^e Luke iii. 12—14.

^f 2 Kings viii. 18.

^g Mark vi. 18—28.

away an evil to which we have been long accustomed. A man that has long yielded to fretfulness and impatience will never want occasions whereon to shew the irritability of his mind. A person who has given way to impurity, will contract such a propensity to the indulgence of it, that his very "eyes will be full of adultery, and he cannot cease from sin^h," even when there are not before him any objects to call it forth; his own polluted imagination furnishing him with plenty of fuel for his unhallowed fire. "The backslider in heart," we are told, "shall be filled with *his own ways*ⁱ:" from whence we see, that *habit* gives to our lusts a certain property in us, and to us a certain property in them; insomuch, that as there is a mutual indwelling between God and the believing soul, so is there also between a sinner and the lusts with which, from habit, he has obtained a more than ordinary familiarity: so true is that declaration of the Apostle, that, whatever be a man's outward temptations, he is, in fact, "drawn away of *his own lust*, and enticed^k."

If, from what has been said, we have any insight into our besetting sin, let us proceed to inquire,

II. How far we are able to adopt the language of the Psalmist in relation to it?

Certainly, we are all deeply interested in this matter. Let me, then, press home upon you the following inquiries:

1. How far have you *discovered* your besetting sin?

[It is surprising to what an extent men in general are blinded in reference to it. All around them see it easily enough, whilst they themselves are strangers to it. All their acquaintance will say, This is a proud man; that a passionate man; that a covetous man; that an uncharitable and censorious man; that a querulous and discontented man. But, however clear men's characteristic infirmities are to others, they are hid from themselves: and in many cases men not only veil their faults under some specious name, but actually take credit to themselves for those very peculiarities as constituting their most distinguishing virtues. The proud man, who for a slight offence will shed the blood of an acquaintance, calls himself a man of honour. The ambitious man, who slaughters thousands and tens of thousands in order to extend his empire, when he has already far more than he knows well how to govern, is

^h 2 Pet. ii. 14.

ⁱ Prov. xiv. 14.

^k Jam. i. 14.

called a conqueror, and values himself upon *that* as entitling him to the admiration of mankind. And the man who is, with insatiable avidity, amassing wealth, applauds himself as prudently providing for his family. And if a man's faults be too glaring to be turned into virtues, he will extenuate them under the name of venial errors, or youthful indiscretions. But, Beloved, if this be your state, you are yet in darkness and the shadow of death. The very first step towards the knowledge of a Saviour is the knowledge of yourselves: and if you possess not *that*, all your other knowledge, whatever it may be, will be in vain.]

2. How far have you watched and prayed against it?

[With all our self-love, our besetting sin may be so glaring and dominant that we cannot but know it. Still, however, we may not be humbled under a sense of it, but, like King Saul, may be returning to it again and again, after all our acknowledgment of its vileness. But it is not thus with an upright soul. He will say with indignation, "What have I to do any more with idols?" And if he has been foiled in one and another attempt to subdue his lusts, he will be more and more earnest in prayer to God for grace sufficient for him, that, "through the influences of the Holy Spirit, he may mortify the deeds of the body¹," and "preserve himself unspotted," though in the midst of a polluting and ensnaring world^m.

See, also, whether you watch against the *occasions* that may call forth your indwelling corruption — — and whether you mark the *first risings* of it in your soul, that you may the more effectually prevent its dominance and defilement? Our Lord's direction is, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:" and he has provided armour for us, that we may fight against sin in its first assaults. And we may be sure, that, if we be not thus habitually contending with it, we can never with truth assert that we have kept ourselves from it.]

3. How far have we actually overcome it?

["One that is born of God cannot commit sinⁿ," as once he did. God has said, that "sin shall not have dominion over him, because he is not under the law, but under grace^o." "The man that obeys sin, is the servant of sin:" and consequently neither is, nor can be, the servant of God^p. He may, it is true, still feel the workings of his besetting sin: but then it will be an intolerable burthen to him: and whilst under a sense of its working, he will cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of sin and death?" he will be enabled to add, "I thank God, through Jesus Christ

¹ Rom. viii. 13.

^m Jam. i. 27.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 9.

^o Rom. vi. 14.

^p Rom. vi. 16.

our Lord^a." I again say, its *motions* may still continue : but its power is broken, and its reign destroyed ; so that he is no longer the bond-slave of Satan ; for " the truth has made him free : and he is free indeed^r."]]

That I may enforce this subject on your hearts and consciences, I declare before God and this assembly,

1. That only in proportion as you keep yourselves from your besetting sin, have you any evidence that you are upright before God—

[David speaks of his victory over his besetting sin as his evidence of his uprightness before God : " I have been upright before God : *for* I have kept myself from my iniquity." Now, I beseech you, Brethren, to try yourselves by this test. " If you are Christ's indeed, you have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts^s ;" and if you are " Israelites indeed, you are without any known and allowed guile^t." But I must warn you, that, if you allow any one sin, you cannot be the servants of Jesus Christ : for if you were really his, you would " walk as he walked^u," and " purify yourselves even as he is pure^x."]]

2. That only in proportion as you keep yourselves from your besetting sin, have you any hope of happiness in the eternal world—

[Our blessed Lord has told us plainly, that " a right eye or a right hand retained by us will be the means of casting us into hell fire^v." What a terrific thought is this ! and how fearful should it make us of self-deception ! Truly, we should not be content with searching and trying ourselves, but should beg of God, also, to " search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting^z." For, if we should be saved at last, " we must be sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ^a."]]

^a Rom. vii. 18, 19, 24, 25.

^r John viii. 32.

^s Gal. v. 24.

^t John i. 47.

^u 1 John ii. 6.

^x 1 John iii. 3.

^v Mark ix. 43—48.

^z Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^a Phil. i. 10.

DXVIII.

EQUITY OF THE DIVINE PROCEDURE.

Ps. xviii. 25, 26. *With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful ; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright ; with the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure ; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.*

IN the present dispensations of Providence, we may behold a far greater measure of equality than is generally imagined: for, not only is the happiness of men less dependent upon outward circumstances than we are apt to suppose, but there is more of just retribution manifested in reference to the conduct of mankind. The ungodly are, for the most part, left to involve themselves in many calamities; whilst the godly are preserved in peace and quietness. There is sufficient of equality in God's dispensations to mark his superintending care; but sufficient inequality to convince us, that there shall be a day of future retribution, when the whole of the divine government shall be justified in the sight of the assembled universe.

The passage before us may be considered as relating to both periods. The Psalmist is returning thanks to God, for having interposed in his behalf to vindicate his integrity against the accusations of his enemies: "The Lord hath recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eye-sight^a." He then goes on to speak of the general system of the divine government, as begun on earth, and as completed in the eternal world: "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful," &c. &c.

From these words, I shall take occasion to shew the equity of the divine procedure,

I. In the punishment of the ungodly—

The day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God; because God will then render unto every man according to his deeds^b." Whatever may have been the conduct of men, the divine conduct towards them shall be in exact accordance with it.

Consider, now, what has been your conduct,

1. Towards God—

[You have felt in your hearts no esteem for him; you have preferred every vanity, and even the basest lust, before

^a ver. 24.

^b Rom. ii. 5, 6.

him: you have not willingly entertained the thought of him in your minds: you have, in effect, "said to him, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways." About his favour you have felt but little concern: nor has it been a matter of any importance in your eyes, whether he was pleased or displeased, honoured or dishonoured. In vain has he called, invited, entreated, expostulated: you have had no disposition to attend to his voice, no heart to comply with his will: and when he has threatened you with his everlasting displeasure, you have set him at nought, and determined to go on in your own ways, whatever might be the consequence.

What now will be the result of this in the last day? God will deal with you as you have dealt with him. "You would not have any thing to do with me: I therefore will have nothing to do with you. You put me far from you: now I put you far from me. You preferred every thing before my favour: expect, therefore, no favour at my hands. It was a pain to you to come into my presence: you shall never be troubled with my presence more. You chose sin, with all its consequences, rather than me and my kingdom: take now, and take for ever, the portion you have chosen."]

2. Towards the Lord Jesus Christ—

[The Saviour has died to effect a reconciliation between God and sinful men; and has offered to cleanse you in his own blood, and to clothe you in the spotless robe of his righteousness, that you may stand before God without spot or blemish. But you would not come to him for his benefits: you have not approved of the offers he has made you: they have been too humiliating for your proud hearts. You have not liked to acknowledge your need of him: you have preferred being a Saviour to yourselves: and have chosen rather to stand or fall by your own righteousness than to submit to the righteousness provided for you by him. In vain has he warned you against the danger of unbelief: you would not see any danger attending it. If you have made any use of Christ at all, it has been rather to encourage a hope of salvation in a sinful and unconverted state than to obtain from him the grace of which you have stood in need.

And what will be the return made to you? "You have rejected my Son," God will say: "you shall therefore have no part in him. You would not submit to be washed by him from your sins: your sins, therefore, shall cleave unto you. You would not seek deliverance from condemnation through him: under condemnation, therefore, shall you lie. You would not take him as a Saviour in any one respect: therefore he shall be no Saviour to you. You made no use of him, but to warrant and justify your continuance in sin: therefore you shall

be left for ever in your sins, and have no part with him to all eternity. The whole tenor of your life has been to this effect, ‘We will not have this man to reign over us:’ and therefore from him and his kingdom you shall be separated for ever.”]

3. Towards your own souls—

[You have not cared about them, or sought their happiness. You have been mindful only of earthly things. Your ease, pleasure, interest, honour, with the approbation of men, have been more to you than any concern pertaining to the soul. Pardon, peace, holiness, glory, have all been, in your esteem, of small account, in comparison of some temporal advantage. And, when warned what must be the issue of such a life, you have determined to run the risk, and to endure the consequences of impenitence, rather than put yourselves to the pain and trouble of repenting. Heaven has had no value, in comparison of some vain indulgence; nor hell any terror, in comparison of the pain of self-denial, and the shame of ridicule from an ungodly world.

According, therefore, as you have sowed, you shall reap: “You have sown to the flesh, and of the flesh you shall reap corruption.” God will say to you, “Your soul shall be of as little value in my eyes, as it was in yours. Heaven was not worth seeking: you shall not have it. Hell was not worth avoiding: you shall take your portion in it. You were satisfied with things temporal: you shall have nothing beyond them. You did not even desire a happiness that is eternal: you shall never have it obtruded upon you, but shall be left destitute of it for ever and ever. You chose to wrestle with me, and walk contrary to me: continue now your fruitless contest to all eternity, whilst I walk contrary to you, and ‘wrestle^c’ with you. You have been the authors of your own destiny: and by your own choice you must abide for ever and ever.”]

The same mode of proceeding is observed by God,

II. In the rewarding of the godly—

Mark how he will act towards,

1. The penitent—

[It is a grief to you that you have ever sinned against so good a God: you are ashamed; you blush and are confounded when you look back upon your ways: you even lothe and abhor yourselves in dust and ashes; and if you could, by any means, undo what you have done amiss, you would do any thing, or suffer any thing, that it were possible for you to do or suffer, to effect it.

^c See the marginal rendering of ver. 26.

How, then, will God deal with you? Do you repent of the evil you have done against me? He will say: Then "I will repent of all the evil which I have thought to do against you^d." Are you saying, How shall I appear before my God? He will say, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, *my repentings* are kindled together: I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger^e." Does he behold you smiting on your thigh, with indignation against yourself, as a vile rebellious wretch? He will construe it as an evidence of your relation to him, and will appeal in your behalf to the whole universe, "Is he not a dear son? Is he not a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^f." The moment he sees thee bewailing bitterly the existence of thy sins, he "blots them out of the book of his remembrance," and "casts them irrecoverably into the depths of the sea."]

2. The believing—

[You are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, as "set forth by God himself to be the propitiation for your sins;" and are desiring nothing under heaven so much as an interest in him — — —

What, then, will God say to you? 'You shall not be disappointed of your hope. Dost thou renounce all dependence on thyself? I will not exact of thee any thing as a justifying righteousness. Dost thou look to what my dear Son has done and suffered for thee, and plead it as the ground of thy hope before me? It shall be imputed to thee, and be accepted in thy behalf. Thou wastest in the fountain opened for sin: it shall cleanse thee so perfectly, that thou shalt stand before me without spot or blemish. Thou trustest in my word: and thou shalt find me a God of truth. Thou layest hold on my promises: not one of them shall ever fail thee. Thou art willing to be saved in the way of mine appointment: and according to thy faith it shall be unto thee. Thou art hoping for a crown of righteousness and glory, as the purchase of my Son's blood: thou shalt possess all that he himself possesses, and be "a joint heir with him" of crowns and kingdoms that shall never fail. Thou hast lived upon him: thou shalt live with him for ever and ever.']

3. The obedient—

^d Exod. xxxii. 9—14. Jer. xviii. 7, 8. and xxvi. 13.

^e Hos. xi. 8, 9.

^f Jer. xxxi. 19, 20.

[You have given up yourselves to God in a way of holy obedience; and have encountered much, in order to approve your fidelity to him. To you, then, God will say, "You have been faithful over a few things: be ye rulers over many things." You acknowledged me as your Master: I acknowledge you as my servants. You regarded me as your Father: I will regard you as my children. To please me was your one aim; and you dared to honour me above all: I will now bless you, and honour you in the sight of the whole assembled universe. You regarded nothing but my favour: you shall have it, and all the tokens of it you can possibly desire. "By patient continuance in well-doing, you sought for glory and honour and immortality; and you shall possess them all, even everlasting life."]

ADDRESS—

[Now choose ye, Brethren, what portion ye will have. I venture to assure you, that it shall be unto you according to your desire, provided only that desire operate practically on your heart and life. I know, indeed, that salvation is altogether of grace: but I know, also, that you can never perish, but by your own consent, and purpose, and will. I mean not to say that any one would choose misery for itself, or in preference to happiness: but if you choose the service of Satan, with all its consequences, in preference to the service of God and its attendant benefits, then are you the authors of your own destruction, as much as you are of the conduct leading to it. God has said, respecting the wicked, "Destruction and misery are *in* their ways:" and to whom can you ascribe your arrival at their end, when you are willingly and deliberately walking in their ways? If you will persuade yourselves that "the broad road, which leadeth to destruction, will bring you to happiness as much as the narrow way that leadeth unto life," you can blame none but yourselves for the disappointment which you will experience. Prepare then for yourselves such an issue to this present state of things, as ye will ere long wish that ye had secured. Hear God's own direction to you: "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for *they shall eat the fruit of their doings*. But woe to the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for *the reward of his hands shall be given to him*." To the same effect our blessed Lord speaks in his sermon on the mount, declaring that the merciful, the pure, the upright, shall have a portion accorded to them suited to their respective characters^h. And remember, that if you obtain not eternal life, the fault was only in yourselves, who, when urged and entreated by your God, refused to walk in the way that would have led you to it.]

^g Isai. iii. 10, 11.

^h Luke vi. 37, 38.

DXIX.

THANKSGIVING FOR ANY GREAT DELIVERANCE.

Ps. xviii. 50. *Great deliverance giveth he to his King; and sheweth mercy to his Anointed, to David, and to his seed for evermore.*

THE Psalm before us is also recorded in the Second Book of Samuel^a. There it stands, as it was drawn up at first by David for his own immediate use: but here it is inserted, with some slight alterations and improvements, for the use of the Church in all ages. The title informs us on what occasion it was written, namely, on David's deliverance from the hand of all his enemies, and especially from the hand of Saul. But, as in most of his psalms, so in this, David speaks, not in his own person only, but in the person of the Messiah, whose type he was. It is a composition of very peculiar beauty: the figures are extremely bold, and the poetry is sublime. Of course the expressions are not to be so literally taken, as if they were an unadorned relation of facts: some of them are altogether figurative; and were verified, not at all in the letter, but only in the Spirit: some are more applicable to David himself, and others to Christ: but altogether it is a poem highly wrought, and exquisitely finished. It is our intention to set before you,

I. The diversified import of this psalm—

The psalm admits of a threefold interpretation;

1. Historical, as it relates to David—

[*David from his youth experienced many troubles.*—From the moment that Saul's envy and jealousy were awakened by the fame of David's exploits, this youth became the object of his incessant persecution; insomuch, that he was forced to flee for his life, and for several years was kept in constant fear of falling a sacrifice to the rage of Saul — — — “The sorrows of death and hell compassed him,” as it were, continually^b.

But his deliverances were great and manifold.—Repeatedly did he, almost by miracle, escape the stroke of the javelin that

^a Chap. xxii.^b ver. 4, 5.

was cast at him; and frequently did God in a visible manner interpose to keep him from falling into the hands of Saul. Once he was in the midst of Saul's army, and in the very same cave with Saul: and yet was preserved by God, so that neither Saul nor any of his soldiers could find it in their hearts to touch him. "David in his distress called upon the Lord; and God heard him out of his holy temple," and delivered him^c.

These deliverances he acknowledges with devoutest gratitude.—Here the Psalmist, borne as it were on eagle's wings, soars into the highest region of poetic imagery: he calls to mind the wonders which God had wrought for Israel of old, and represents them as renewed in his own experience. The glorious manifestations of Jehovah on Mount Sinai were not more bright in his eyes^d, nor the passage of Israel through the Red Sea more wonderful^e, than were the displays of almighty power and love which he had seen in his behalf^f. In these deliverances he further acknowledges the equity of God in having so vindicated his character from the undeserved calumnies by which his enemies had sought to justify their cruelty towards him^g.

From the experiences of past mercies, he expresses his confidence in God under whatever trials might yet await him.—It is delightful to see how careful he is to ascribe all the glory of his preservation to that God who had delivered him^h;— —and the full persuasion that his victory would in due time be completeⁱ. Then with profoundest gratitude he blesses and adores his heavenly Benefactor for all the mercies he has received; recapitulating as it were, and giving us the substance of the whole, in the words of our text^k.

Were we to view the psalm only as an historical record, it would be very instructive: but it has a far higher sense: it is,

2. Prophetical, as it relates to Christ—

[That it is a prophecy respecting Christ and his Gospel, we are assured by one whose testimony is decisive on the point. St. Paul, maintaining that Christ, though himself "a minister of the circumcision," was to have his Gospel preached to the Gentiles, and to establish his kingdom over the heathen world, expressly *quotes the words immediately preceding our text, as prophetic of that event*¹. Here therefore we see it *proved*, that David spake as a type of Christ; and a clew is given us for a fuller understanding of the whole psalm.

Behold then in this psalm our adorable Redeemer: behold *his conflicts*! He was indeed "a man of sorrows and

^c ver. 6.

^f ver. 16—19.

ⁱ ver. 43—45.

^d ver. 7—14.

^g ver. 21—27.

^k ver. 46—50.

^e ver. 15.

^h ver. 28—42.

¹ Rom. xv. 9.

acquainted with grief;" "nor was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow:" "his visage was marred more than any man's, and his form more than the sons of men." How justly it might be said of him, that "the sorrows of hell encompassed him," we learn from his history: "Now," says he, "is my soul sorrowful even unto death." In the garden he was in such an agony, that he sweat great drops of blood from every pore. And on the cross he uttered the heart-rending cry, My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" In that hour all the powers of darkness were let loose upon him: and God himself also, even the Father, combined to "bruise him," till he fell a victim to the broken law, a sacrifice, "a curse^m."

But speedily we behold *his deliverances*. Like David, "he cried to the Lord in his distress:" "he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears; and was heard, in that he fearedⁿ." In him the elevated language of the Psalmist obtained a more literal accomplishment: for at his resurrection "the earth quaked, the rocks rent;" and together with him, as monuments and witnesses of his triumph, "many of the dead came forth from their graves, and went into the city, and appeared unto many. O, what a deliverance was here! "The cords of death were loosed" (it was not possible that he should any longer be held by them): and he rose triumphant from the grave: yea, he ascended, too, to heaven, and was there seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, all the angels and principalities and powers of heaven, earth, and hell, being made subject unto him. In comparison of this display of the Divine glory, the images referred to in this psalm were faint, even as a taper before the sun.

Then commenced *his victories*. Then was literally fulfilled that prediction of the Psalmist, "a people whom I have not known shall serve me; as soon as they hear of me, they shall obey me^o." No less than three thousand of his murderers were converted in the very first sermon: and soon his kingdom was established throughout the whole Roman Empire. This prediction is yet daily receiving a more enlarged accomplishment: thousands in every quarter of the globe are submitting themselves to him; and in due season, all the kingdoms of the world will acknowledge him their universal Lord. The triumphs of David over the neighbouring nations, though signal, were nothing in comparison of those which Christ is gaining over the face of the whole earth: and he will "go on conquering and to conquer," "till all his enemies are put under his feet." O blessed and glorious day! May "the Lord hasten it in his time!"

^m Gal. iii. 13.ⁿ ver. 6. with Heb. v. 7.^o ver. 43, 44.

But like many other passages of Scripture, the psalm admits also of an interpretation, which is,]

3. Spiritual, as it relates to the people of God in all ages—

[The circumstance of its having been altered, and set apart for the use of the Church, shews, that, in substance, it exhibits the dealings of God with his people in all ages. They, like David, and like their blessed Lord and Master, have their *trials*, their *deliverances*, their *triumphs*; in all of which God is greatly glorified, and for which he ought ever to be adored. Who amongst us that has ever been oppressed with a sense of guilt, and with a fear of God's wrath; who that has felt the tranquillizing influence of the Redeemer's blood sprinkled on his conscience, and speaking peace to his soul; who that has been enabled to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to serve his God in newness of heart and life; who, I say, that has experienced these things, does not find, that the language of this psalm, figuratively indeed, but justly, depicts the gracious dealings of God towards him? — — — Methinks, the sentiment that is uppermost in the mind of every such person is, "Who is God, save the Lord? or who is a rock, save our God?"]

But this part of our subject will receive fuller illustration whilst we notice the psalm in reference to,
II. The use we should make of it—

The practical use of Scripture is that to which we should more particularly apply ourselves; and especially should we keep this in view in reading the Psalms, which, beyond any other part of the sacred volume, are calculated to elevate our souls to heaven, and to fill us with delight in God. From this psalm in particular we should learn,

1. To glorify God for the mercies he has vouchsafed unto us—

[We should never forget what we were, whilst dead in trespasses and sins, and what we are made by the effectual working of God's grace in our souls. The change is nothing less than "passing from death unto life," and "from the power of Satan unto God:" and when we contemplate it, we should be filled with wonder and with love on account of the stupendous mercies we have received. We should ever remember, "Who it is that has made us to differ" from those who are yet

in darkness and the shadow of death: and the constant frame of our souls should be, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise!" We may, indeed, without impropriety on some occasions say, as the Psalmist, "*I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them; I have wounded them, that they were not able to rise;*" but we must soon check ourselves, like St. Paul, and say, "Yet not *I*, but the grace of God that was with me:" "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing, is God." It is worthy of particular observation, how anxious David is to give to God all the glory of those exploits which he commemorates; "*By Thee I have run through a troop; and by my God I have leaped over a wall*" — — — Let us imitate him in this respect, and "give unto our God the glory due unto his name:" yea, "let our mouths be filled with his praise all the day long."]

2. To confide in God under all future difficulties—

[In what exalted terms David speaks of God at the commencement of this psalm^r! — — — Verily, *he* had profited well from his past experience. And ought not *we* to profit in like manner? Ought not *we* to remember what God is to all his believing people? If we have God for our God, what have we to fear? Can any enemy prevail against us, when *HE* is on our side? Remember how God reproved those of old, who, when danger threatened them, gave way to terror, instead of trusting confidently in their God: "Say ye not, A confederacy, a confederacy! &c. but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread: and he shall be to you for a sanctuary^s." Whatever be your want, know that He is able to supply it — — — whatever be your difficulty, He can make you triumphant over it — — — "His way is perfect: his word is tried: he is a buckler to all those who trust in him^t."]

3. To conduct ourselves so that we may reasonably expect his blessing—

[Though God is found of them that sought him not, and dispenses his blessings altogether sovereignly and according to his own good pleasure towards the ungodly world, he proceeds, for the most part, in a way of equity towards his own peculiar people. The declaration that was made to king Asa is found true in every age: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you^u." Precisely to the same effect are those expressions of the Psalmist, "With the upright,

^r ver. 29. See also ver. 32—36, 47—49.

^s Isaï. viii. 12—14.

^t ver. 30.

^r ver. 2.

^u 2 Chron. xv. 2.

the merciful, the pure, thou wilt shew thyself upright, and merciful, and pure; but with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward," or, as it is in the margin, "thou wilt *wrestle*." "Thou wilt save the afflicted people (i. e. the humble); but thou wilt bring down high looks^x." If we walk uprightly and circumspectly before him, and in a humble dependence on his grace, there is not any thing which he will not do for us: but, "if we regard iniquity in our hearts, he will not hear us." Inquire, then, whether you are really "keeping the ways of the Lord," and are "keeping yourselves from *your* iniquity," that is, from the peculiar sin to which, by constitution, by habit, or by your situation in life, you are most exposed^y. I charge you, before God, that you all make this a matter of serious inquiry. The "besetting sin," ah! it is that which separates between God and our souls; it is that which "keeps good things from us." How many are there, who, whilst they make a profession of religion, are yet, by their unmortified lusts, or worldly desires, or slothful habits, or by some habitual evil, provoking God to depart from them! Beware lest it be so with you; and "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." You may grieve him, till you altogether "quench" his sacred motions. We entreat you to be upon your guard against this so fatal an evil. "Keep your hearts with all diligence:" yea, "give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." Then shall God delight himself in you, and be not only your present portion, "but your everlasting great reward."]

^x ver. 25—27.

^y ver. 21—23.

DXX.

EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S WORD.

Ps. xix. 7—9. *The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple: the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.*

GOD has not left himself without witness even amongst the most unenlightened heathens. His works testify of him: the heavens and the earth declare his eternal power and godhead. They speak silently indeed^a, but intelligibly, to every child of

^a ver. 3. The words printed in *Italics* are not in the original.

man; so that idolaters of every name are absolutely without excuse^b. Wherever the light and genial influence of the sun extend, there is God proclaimed as an infinitely wise and gracious Being. But *we* have a richer source of instruction opened to us: we have a revelation, which, whilst it proclaims the existence and attributes of Jehovah, makes known to us his will, and points out the path in which we may approach him with a certainty of acceptance: and so extensively was that published by our Lord and his Apostles, that it might be said, even in that age, “Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world^c.” It is of this written word that David speaks in the psalm before us: in which are set forth,

I. Its parts and properties—

The various terms here used to designate the word of God, may be considered as directing our attention to all the different parts of that word; each of which has, annexed to it, an appropriate epithet of commendation—

[“The *law* of the Lord” is in the marginal translation called, “The doctrine of the Lord;” and it may be understood as including under one general term all that is afterwards more particularly specified: and it is so “perfect,” that nothing can be taken from it, or added to it, but at the peril of our souls^d — — — “The *testimony* of the Lord” is “the Gospel of the grace of God^e,” even “the witness which God has testified of his Son^f.” It is “the record that God has given of his Son, namely, that in him is eternal life; and that he who hath the Son, hath life: and he who hath not the Son of God, hath not life^g.” Now this is “sure,” so sure, that it may be relied upon with the most implicit confidence: “it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners^h.”—“The *statutes* of the Lord” are those ordinances, which God appointed under the ceremonial law to shadow forth all the glorious mysteries of the Gospel, and which were “right for the time then present; though, since the introduction of the clearer light of the Gospel, they are abrogated as burthensome and unnecessary. Not but that there are

^b Rom. i. 19, 20.

^c Compare ver. 4. with Rom. x. 18.

^d Rev. xxii. 18, 19.

^e Acts xx. 24.

^f 1 John v. 9.

^g 1 John v. 11, 12.

^h 1 Tim. i. 15.

some still in force, such as the Sabbath, and the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And these may well be called "right:" for who can doubt the propriety of a certain portion of our time being dedicated to the especial service of Him to whom we owe our very existence? or who can question the suitableness of those easy and instructive rites, whereby we are dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ at first, and afterwards commemorate from time to time the wonders of his dying love? "The *commandment* of the Lord" is the moral law, in which we are taught, in what way we are to serve and please our God. And this is "pure," and "holyⁱ:" it is given to regulate, not our words and actions only, but the inmost thoughts and desires of our hearts. It is indeed "exceeding broad^k," extending to every motive and principle of the mind, yea, to every inclination, affection, appetite of the soul, and requiring the whole to be in a state of constant and entire conformity to the will of God. "The *fear* of the Lord" we consider as another name for the Holy Scriptures, only putting, as is frequently done, the effect for the cause^l. The word of God, as *inculcating* and *exciting* the fear of the Lord, is "clean;" its one object is, to cleanse and purify the souls of men. Hence our Lord says, "Now ye are clean through the word that I have spoken unto you^m." Moreover, the word, in this view of it, "endureth for ever," since its operation is uniform to the end of the world; and the purifying effects produced by it, will continue through all eternity. "The *judgments* of the Lord" are his warnings and threatenings; which though questioned by men as false, or condemned by them as unjust, are yet "true and righteous altogether." We are very incompetent judges of the demerit of sin, or of the conduct which God, as the moral Governor of the universe, has thought proper to pursue: but we are assured, that, when he shall inflict on the impenitent the judgments he has denounced against them, all his intelligent creatures will exclaim, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord God Almighty!" "just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints!"

As the different terms which we have considered

ⁱ Rom. vii. 12.

^k Ps. cxix. 96.

^l The author would be understood to speak this with diffidence, because he is not aware that any commentator has put this construction on the words: but he considers any other interpretation as unsuitable to the context. Something similar occurs Gen. xxxi. 42. where God is called, "The fear of Isaac;" where not the *act*, but the *object*, of Isaac's fear is spoken of. If this sense be not approved, the reader may understand the words as signifying, *The worship of God*.

^m John xv. 3. Compare also Eph. v. 26.

are not so definite in their import but that they admit of different interpretations, we shall wave the further consideration of them; and, comprehending them all under one general term, ‘The word of God,’ we shall proceed to notice,

II. Its use and excellence—

It would occupy too much time to enter fully into this subject: let it suffice to notice those particular uses which are mentioned in our text. The word then is of use,

1. To illuminate the mind—

[Previous to the application of the word to the heart by the Holy Spirit, we are in utter darkness: but “the entrance of God’s word giveth light.” Truly it is a “marvellous light that we are brought into,” when our eyes are opened to discern “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” — — — Nor is it the learned only who receive instruction from it: it is intended more especially for the poor. There is something in the Gospel which tends rather to offend the proud, but is most palatable and delightful to the humble. Hence we are told, “It maketh wise the simple.” What astonishing views of God, of Christ, of the human heart, of the evil of sin, of the beauty of holiness, of the felicity of heaven, have many unlettered persons attained! Yet it is in the knowledge of these things that true wisdom consists: and this knowledge is imparted to all who embrace the Gospel, in proportion to the simplicity of their minds, and the devotedness of their hearts to God. These are “the things,” which, as our blessed Lord informs us, “are hid from the wise and prudent, and are revealed unto babes.” Without such a special illumination of the mind, the most learned philosopher cannot comprehend them”; and by such an illumination the most untutored savage shall be “made wise unto salvation.”]

2. To convert the soul—

[Truly, “the word is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.” It is “the rod of God’s strength,” even that wonder-working rod, which subdues all his enemies before him. “Like fire it melts; and like a hammer, it breaketh the rock in pieces.” See its effects upon the three thousand on the day of Pentecost! such is its operation, wherever “it comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” It humbles the proudest spirit, and subdues the most obdurate heart to the obedience of faith. Nor is it to the adoption of new principles

only that it brings the soul, but to the acquisition of new habits; so that it becomes set on *Christ* and heavenly things, as once it was set on *self* and earthly things: it assimilates the soul to Christ as the great exemplar, and "changes it into the divine image, from one degree of glory to another, by the Spirit of our God."]

3. To rejoice the heart—

[Ignorant men imagine that the application of God's word to the soul is productive only of pain and sorrow: but those who have ever "tasted of the good word of life" have found, by happy experience, that it fills them "with joy and peace in believing," yea, "with joy unspeakable and glorified." The word is to them the charter of all their privileges, and the map of their everlasting inheritance. As an heir peruses with delight a will in which great wealth is unexpectedly bequeathed to him, so the Christian finding in every page of the sacred volume his title to all the blessedness and glory of heaven, how can he but rejoice in such records? how can he but concur with David in saying, "They are more desired by me than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb?"]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. Our privilege—

[If it was the highest privilege of the Jews, that "to them were committed the oracles of God," much more are we distinguished, who have the writings of the New Testament superadded to those of the Old. Let us learn to estimate this privilege aright. Let us remember, that in this blessed volume is contained all that can be needful either for the instruction of our minds, or the salvation of our souls: and, whilst we enjoy this inestimable blessing ourselves, let us labour by all possible means to communicate it to others———]

2. Our duty—

[We should "search the Scriptures daily," "digging into them as for hid treasures," and praying earnestly to God, that he would "open our understandings to understand them." We should look to them as the ground of all our hopes, and the rule of all our conduct. To study the book of nature will be well: but to study the sacred volume with prayer will tend to our highest perfection, and will "thoroughly furnish us unto every good word and work."]

DXXI.

THE USE AND BENEFIT OF THE SCRIPTURES.

Ps. xix. 10, 11. *More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.*

GOD has at no time left himself without witness in the world, seeing that he has spoken to all, in and by the visible creation, from which the most unenlightened heathens might learn his eternal power and godhead. But to us he has communicated a perfect revelation of his mind and will, which, as the Psalmist informs us in the preceding verses, is capable of producing the most beneficial effects. It was but a small portion of the Scriptures which David possessed; yet his testimony respecting them shews, that they were inestimable in his eyes, and that to all who received them aright, they would be a source of the richest blessings. In discoursing on his words we shall point out,

I. The excellency of the Scriptures—

Gold and honey are both excellent in their kind, and may fitly represent those things which are most pleasing to a carnal and a sensual appetite: but the Scriptures are infinitely preferable to both.

1. They are “more desirable than gold”—

[Gold, though so ardently and universally desired, is yet very confined in its uses. It is useful only to the body; yet not to that in all circumstances, nor for any long duration. But the Scriptures are profitable to the soul, and that too in every possible condition: nor will there be any termination to the benefits they convey. What light do they bring into the mind! the weakest Christian upon earth that is instructed out of them, as far surpasses all the philosophers of Greece and Rome, as they surpassed the most ignorant of the human race. How powerful too is their operation on the soul! the suggestions of man’s wisdom were utterly incapable of counteracting the vicious propensities of the heart: but these, when applied with power from on high, subdue the soul to God, and renovate it after the divine image. Can gold then, however “great” in quantity, or “fine” in quality, be compared with these?]

2. They are “sweeter also than honey”—

[The most delicious honey is not near so grateful to the palate, as the Scriptures are to the spiritual taste. *The doctrines* of the Gospel, especially that which is the fundamental article of our faith, salvation through the blood of our incarnate God, how inexpressibly sweet are they to a weary and heavy-laden soul! What a delightful feast do *the promises*, “the exceeding great and precious promises,” afford to those who live upon them! *The precepts* too are equally high in the Christian’s estimation: their purity exactly suits his appetite, and instead of disgusting him, renders them tenfold more pleasing to his soul^a. Nor is he averse to *the threatenings* themselves: while he regards them as holy and just, he considers them also as good^b. In short, the Christian feasts upon the blessed book of God; he finds it the joy and rejoicing of his heart^c; he esteems it more than his necessary food^d.]

But we will proceed to mark more distinctly,

II. Their use—

A variety of uses are mentioned in the preceding context: but the text comprehends them all under two particulars:

1. They warn us against much evil—

[We could have had no conception of the deceitfulness and depravity of the heart, if God had not revealed it to us. But from the insight into it which the Scriptures afford us, we learn that to trust in one’s own heart is the most consummate folly^e, since it is sure to mislead us, and to betray us into some evil.

From the same fountain of knowledge also we learn that there is an invisible, but mighty, agent, whose malice is most inveterate, whose devices are most subtle, and whose labours to destroy us are incessant. Against his wiles we are put upon our guard: we are taught how to distinguish his agency, and to defeat his plots.

There is yet another danger, of which we could have formed no idea, if God had not instructed us respecting it. We are told of another invisible power, even the Holy Ghost himself, who strives with us, and endeavours to establish the kingdom of God in our hearts. But we may “grieve,” and “vex” that divine Agent, and may so “resist” him as to “quench” his sacred motions. Against this therefore, as the greatest of all evils, we are frequently and strongly warned.

It is no small advantage to us that every duty, and every

^a Ps. cxix. 140.

^b Rom. vii. 12.

^c Jer. xv. 16.

^d Job xxiii. 12.

^e Prov. xxviii. 26.

danger, is set before us in living characters. We are enabled in the Scriptures to discern the track of the godly, and to see where all that have suffered shipwreck, have perished: so that, notwithstanding we are passing through an ocean filled with hidden rocks and shoals, yet, if we only attend to the buoys which God has placed in our sight, we cannot but navigate it in perfect safety, and reach in due season our destined port.]

2. They lead us to much good—

[We speak not of the recompence, which those who love the Scriptures will meet with in another world. There is a reward *in* keeping the commandments, as well as *for* it; and it is of that *present* recompence that we are called to speak. In receiving the doctrines, what peace do we obtain with God, and in our own consciences! In resting on the promises, what ineffable joy flows into our souls! In obeying the precepts, what heavenly dispositions do we exercise, and what conformity to God do we obtain! And lastly, in following the bright examples that are set before us, how is our ambition stimulated, and how are our steps advanced! Unanswerable in every view is that appeal of God to man, “Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly^f?”]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who neglect the Scriptures—

[How vitiated is your taste, that you can prefer a novel or a newspaper to the inspired volume! That you can be anxious about the things of *time* and *sense*, and be indifferent to that, which is more valuable than *gold*, more sweet than *honey*! Ah, think what durable riches, what heavenly delights, you lose! Did you but know what reason you have for shame and regret, you would go and search the Scriptures till you had learned their value by your own experience, and had found them to be the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

2. Those who are like-minded with the Psalmist—

[What do you owe to God, who has given you a spiritual taste, a spiritual discernment! By this, as much as by any thing, you may know your state towards God: you may mark, as by a scale, your progress or decline. With your advancement in the divine life, the Scriptures will rise in your estimation: with your declension, your relish for them will abate. O then “let them be your meditation all the day; let them be your delight and your counsellors.” Thus will your spirit and temper be cast into their mould, and you will be gradually fitted for that place, where all that is now held forth to your faith, shall be for ever realized.]

^f Mic. ii. 7.

DXXII.

PRAYER AGAINST SINS OF INFIRMITY AND PRESUMPTION.

Ps. xix. 12, 13. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.*

THE moral law, as revealed in the Scriptures, is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and is therefore a mirror in which we may see how deformed we are through the introduction and dominance of sin. It was from a contemplation of its transcendent excellence that the Psalmist was led to bewail his want of conformity to it, and to implore mercy at the hands of God for his innumerable violations of it, and grace, to preserve him from any wilful opposition to it in future. And the more we study it, the more shall we be disposed to adopt the petitions in our text, "Cleanse me" from the guilt I have already contracted: "Keep me" from falling a sacrifice to my sinful propensities.

We all need to be delivered from,

I. Sins of infirmity—

These are innumerable—

[It is not of gross outward sin that we are here to speak, but of "errors" and "secret sins;" that is, such sins as escape the notice of ourselves as well as of others.

Consider the sins arising *from defect*. The law requires that we love God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength; and our neighbour, under whatever circumstances, *as ourselves*. Now, if we trace the whole extent of our duty to God, as our Creator; to the Lord Jesus Christ, as our Redeemer; and to the Holy Spirit, as our Sanctifier; if we further pursue into all the different relations of life our duty to our fellow-creatures, and reflect that the smallest short-coming in the performance of it is sin: and then, if we reflect how great our short-comings are, even when we exert ourselves to the uttermost to fulfil the will of God; we shall see that, under this head alone, our sins are more numerous than the sands upon the sea-shore; since, in fact, we have been doing nothing but what, in fact, was sin, from the very first moment that we came into the world.

But besides the guilt we have contracted through defect, consider that which has arisen *from deviations* from the precise line of duty which we should have followed. We may conceive of an arrow shot in the right line towards an object, though it fall short of the object itself: and so we may conceive of our attempts to serve God, as perfect in point of aim, though defective in force and energy. But there is a bias in our fallen nature which causes innumerable aberrations from the perfect line of duty. In duty, of whatever kind it be, the principle ought to be as pure as the light itself: but in us it never is so: somewhat of a corrupt mixture will be found in every thing we do. There is so much blindness in our understanding, so much perverseness in our will, and so much sensuality in our affections, that we are imperceptibly drawn aside; our very judgment is deceived; yea, "our mind and conscience are defiled;" so that, when we would do good, evil is present with us;" and, when we do, as we think, act entirely as unto the Lord, the heart-searching God beholds a mixture of *self* in our best motives, that serves yet further to vitiate and debase our best actions.

To all this add our *actual transgressions*, by thought, word, and deed, against the holy commands of God. It is still of "secret sins" only that I am speaking, and of such as may justly be called sins of infirmity. But how vast the aggregate of evil which has arisen in our hearts from the secret workings of pride, or worldliness, or impurity, or unbelief, or some other corrupt feeling of our fallen nature! Yet not one of these has been unobserved by God, nor will one be kept out of sight in the final judgment.

Well then may we, even in this superficial view of our past errors and deviations, say, "Who can understand them?"]

We need therefore to cry earnestly to God to "cleanse us from them"—

[The guilt in which they involve the soul is exceeding great: nor can it be purged away but by the atoning blood of Christ. The circumstance of their having been unobserved by us does not lessen the guilt of them, as we imagine; but only shews how blind and ignorant we are, and how vitiated and debased that soul must be which can harbour such evils unconscious of their malignity, and almost of their very existence. God himself cautions us against regarding this as an extenuation, which, if rightly viewed, is rather an aggravation of our guilt. "Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error; wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?" An atonement was offered by the high priests

^a Eccl. v. 6.

of old “for the *errors* of the people^b,” and in the atonement of Christ must we seek refuge from all which have been, however inadvertently, committed by us. This is strongly intimated by the offerings which were appointed for all without exception, when they erred; but which differed according to the degree of criminality which might justly attach to persons, by reason of their advantages for knowing better, and the injury that was likely to accrue from their example^c. But none were excused: the very moment that their error was pointed out to them, they were to bring their offering: and through that alone could they obtain absolution from their sin^d. We should therefore, all, without exception, pray with David, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” Yea, we should also pray with him, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!” For “God requireth truth in our inward parts:” and, if we are not thus “renewed in the spirit of our minds,” we cannot hope for admission into that city “where no unclean thing can enter^e.”]

Yet, after all, our guilt from these is light in comparison of that which ariseth from our,

II. Sins of presumption—

These differ widely from the former; being committed, not from mere inadvertence or infirmity, but with the concurrence of the will in opposition to the dictates of an enlightened conscience. Yet in speaking of these we shall not confine ourselves to those grosser sins, from which more moral and decent persons are exempt; but shall turn your attention rather to that state and habit of life which conscience must condemn, as well as the more flagrant transgressions.

Consider what “presumptuous sins” are—

[They are any sins whatever that are committed against light and knowledge, or on a presumption that God will not punish them in the eternal world.

Now it is perfectly well known to all of us, that we ought to have “the fear of God before our eyes:” we ought to stand in awe of God’s judgments; we ought to search out and execute his commands. We ought not to live unto ourselves, but unto him: and to make his word the unvaried rule of our conduct. We know that we have duties also towards our adorable

^b Heb. ix. 7.

^c Lev. iv. 1—35.

^d Lev. v. 17—19.

^e Rev. xxi. 27.

Redeemer: and that, as we should live altogether by faith in him, so we should live altogether to his glory. Now, if we are habitually neglecting these duties, and living to ourselves and to the world, what is our life but one continued course of presumptuous sin? — — — I wish that the more moral, decent, and conscientious part of my audience would attend to this, that they may see how great their deficiencies are, and how awful their guilt.]

To these we are ever prone—

[Every man by nature rushes into them, even as a horse into the battle: nor can any but God “keep us back” from them. How daring we are in the commission of them, is plain from numberless passages of Scripture, where the language of the carnal heart is depicted; “Tush! God shall not see; neither will the Almighty regard it.” We have a general notion about God’s mercy: and from the very hope that he will forbear to execute the award of justice, we are encouraged to proceed in our career of sin; thus “turning the very grace of God into licentiousness,” and “continuing in sin with the hope that grace will abound.” And what an ascendant these sins will gain over us may be daily seen, not only in the impieties of those who never knew any thing of God, but in the degeneracy of many, who once gave promises of better things. The gradations of such persons’ departure from God are strongly marked by the Psalmist: they first “*walk* (transiently) in the *counsel* of the *ungodly*, (who, from their want of real piety, are dangerous advisers;) they then learn to *stand* (deliberately) in the *way* (and habits) of the wicked; and then come to *sit* (habitually and at their ease) in the *seat* of the *scornful*.” And this is no other than what every presumptuous sinner has reason to expect: for God is indignant against him, in proportion as his transgressions partake of this horrid aggravation. Of the heathen it is said, “They liked not to retain God in their knowledge; therefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind^g,” and even of his own people Israel themselves, God says, “Israel would none of me: so I gave them up^h.” What wonder, then, if he should say of us also, “They are joined to idols: let them aloneⁱ?” If instead of crying mightily to God to “keep us back” from presumptuous sins, we yield ourselves willingly to the commission of them, we can expect nothing, but that they should “have the entire dominion over us,” and constrain God to “swear in his wrath, that we shall never enter into his rest.” This, I say, we may well expect: for God has declared, that]

^f Ps. i. 1.

^h Ps. lxxxii. 11, 12.

^g Rom. i. 8.

ⁱ Hos. iv. 17.

If not delivered from them in time, we shall suffer the punishment of them to all eternity—

[How heinous they are in the sight of God may be known from hence; that, though sacrifices were appointed for sins of infirmity, none were prescribed for any presumptuous sin whatever: the offender was to be cut off without mercy from the people of the Lord^k — — — The servant that knew not his lord's will, and did things contrary to it, was yet accounted worthy of some punishment: but he who knowingly violated his lord's commands, was "beaten with many stripes^l." And Capernaum's doom, we are told, shall be more severe than that of Sodom and Gomorrha, because of the deeper malignity which her superior advantages infused into all her sins^m.

Let me then entreat you to adopt the prayer in our text: beg of God that he would enable you to "understand your errors;" (for who, without divine instruction, can understand them?) and that he would "cleanse you" from them; and that he would "keep you back" from every presumptuous sin: for though every presumptuous sin is not the unpardonable transgression, yet, I must say, that presumptuous sin, continued in after warnings and exhortations to depart from it, hardens the heart, and sears the conscience, and endangers the being given up by God to final impenitence.]

APPLICATION—

Be prevailed upon, Brethren,

1. To regard sin as the greatest of all evils—

[Such indeed it is, whether ye will believe it or not. You may be ready to think that suffering is the greatest: but suffering may tend to good: it may, like the furnace, purify us from our dross, and prepare us, under God's gracious care, as vessels of honour for our Master's use. But sin defiles, debases, and destroys the soul. "Fools may make a mock at it;" but at last it will "sting like a serpent, and bite like an adder:" it may be sweet in the mouth, but it will be gall in the stomach. See, Brethren, from what a mass of guilt and corruption you need to be delivered! See also what judgments are hanging over your devoted heads! O that I could see you in earnest in fleeing from the wrath to come, and in laying hold on eternal life! Be ye not like that perverse and daring people, who, when remonstrated with by the prophet, replied, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee: but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouthⁿ." Neither

^k Numb. xv. 27—31.

^m Matt. xi. 23, 24.

^l Luke xii. 47, 48.

ⁿ Jer. xlv. 16, 17.

deceive yourselves by endeavouring to vindicate yourselves before God: for, whatever you may say to extenuate your guilt, your sins even of infirmity need forgiveness; and your sins of presumption, if not repented of and forgiven, will plunge you into remediless and endless ruin.]

2. To improve the present moment in order to obtain deliverance from it—

[*Now* you can offer the prayer of David: but how long that privilege will be continued to you, you know not. This however you know, that your views of sin will soon be changed, either in this world or in the world to come. Conceive of a presumptuous sinner, dying in his iniquity, and first having his eyes opened in the eternal world. What does he then think of all his past excuses, on which he once placed such confident reliance? What, if he were permitted to address you from his abode of misery, would be the scope of his admonitions? Can you doubt? And, if not, will you still go on in those ways, which your own consciences condemn? But, as the Rich Man was not suffered to return from hell to warn his surviving brethren, who were walking in his steps, so neither will any be sent from the dead, to instruct you. You have Moses and the prophets; and those you must both hear and obey: and, if you will not believe them, nothing awaits you but to “eat the fruit of your own doings, and to be filled immediately with your own devices.” Now, however, you are warned: now, I trust, your consciences attest the truth and importance of all that ye have heard: and now I conclude with that solemn admonition of St. James, “To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin^o.”]

° Jam. iv. 17.

DXXIII.

TRUST IN GOD, THE MEANS OF SUCCESS.

Ps. xx. 7. *Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the Lord our God.*

ASTONISHING is the success of united prayer: nor are any so situated as not to need the intercessions of others. David, though so great and powerful, stood in need of them: and he here records the benefit he received from them^a — — —

The Psalmist here records,

^a See, and quote the whole preceding context.

I. The different grounds of men's confidence—

The generality make the creature their confidence—

[This prevailed universally among the heathen ———
And it too generally pervaded the Jewish nation also ———
We too, in all our straits and difficulties, are prone to it;
leaning to our understanding ——— resting on our own resolutions ——— and undertaking every thing in a dependence on self ———]

The only proper ground of confidence is God—

[He alone is all-sufficient ——— With him every thing is easy ——— David abhorred the idea of resting on any other^b ——— Hence he adopted the resolution in the text.]

II. The correspondent issues of their confidence—

Those who depend on the creature are disappointed—

[This has frequently been the case^c ——— And it is only what may be expected^d ——— Creature-confidence arms God against us^e ——— and entails his curse on all who indulge it^f ———]

But those who depend on God succeed—

[So did Asa^g ——— So did Jehoshaphat^h ——— So did Hezekiahⁱ ——— So did David^k ——— And so shall all, even to the end of the world^l ———]

INFER,

1. What obligations do we owe to God for the mercies we have now received^m! ———

2. What shall not they receive who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? ———

^b Ps. cxxi. 1, 2. and xi. 1—4. Mark the *spirit* of these passages.

^c 1 Kings xx. 23. ^d Ps. xxxiii. 17. ^e Isai. xxxi. 1, 3.

^f Jer. xvii. 5, 6. ^g 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12.

^h 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15, 20. ⁱ 2 Chron. xxxii. 7, 21.

^k ver. 8. ^l Ps. xxxiv. 22. and cxxv. 1, 2.

^m Here bring forward the particular circumstances for which the Thanksgiving is appointed.

DXXIV.

THE KINGDOM OF DAVID AND OF CHRIST.

Ps. xxi. 1—7. *The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice! Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the*

request of his lips. For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness; thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head. He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever. His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance. For the king trusteth in the Lord; and, through the mercy of the Most High, he shall not be moved.

THIS psalm is appointed by the Church to be read on the day of our Lord's Ascension: and on a close examination, it will appear to be well suited to that occasion. We will,

I. Explain it—

In its primary and literal sense, it expresses David's gratitude on his advancement to the throne of Israel—

[After acknowledging, in general terms, God's goodness towards him in this dispensation, he speaks of his elevation as an answer to his prayers, though in its origin it was altogether unsolicited and unsought for^a Impressed with the greatness of the honour conferred upon him, he exults in it, especially as affording him an opportunity of benefiting others^b; and declares his confidence, that his enemies, so far from ever being able to subvert his government, shall all be crushed before him^c—

Passing over this view of the psalm, we proceed to observe, that]

It is yet more applicable to Christ, as expressing his feelings on his ascension to the throne of glory—

[David was a type of Christ, as David's kingdom was of Christ's kingdom: and Christ, on his ascension to heaven, may be considered as addressing his Father in the words of this psalm.

He declares his joy and gratitude *on account of the blessedness vouchsafed to him, and on account of the blessedness which he was now empowered to bestow on others.* With respect to his own blessedness we observe, that *his conflicts were now terminated.* These had been numerous and severe. From his first entrance into the world to the instant of his departure from it, he “was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” View him especially during the three years of his Ministry, what “contradiction of sinners against himself did he endure!”—— View more particularly the four last days of his life, what

^a ver. 1—4.

^b ver. 5, 6.

^c ver. 7—12.

grievous and accumulated wrongs did he sustain! — — — Consider his conflicts also with the powers of darkness, and the terrors of his Father's wrath — — — O what reason had he to rejoice in the termination of such sufferings, and to magnify his Father who had brought him in safety through them! For this he had prayed; and God had given him the fullest answer to his prayers^d. Now also *he was restored to glory*. He had "a glory with the Father before the worlds were made^e:" and of that glory he had divested himself when he assumed our nature^f. But now he was restored to it: and what a contrast did it form with that state, from which he had been delivered! A few days ago he had not where to lay his head: now he is received into his Father's house, his Father's bosom. Lately he was derided, mocked, insulted, spit upon, buffeted, and scourged by the vilest of the human race; and now he is seated on his throne of glory, and worshipped and adored by all the hosts of heaven — — — Great indeed was the glory that now accrued to him, and great "the majesty that was now laid upon him^g" — — — and, as it had proceeded from his Father^h, so he justly acknowledges it as his Father's gift.

But it was not to himself only that Jesus had respect: he blesses his Father also for the *blessedness which he was empowered to bestow on others*. The words, "Thou hast made him most blessed for ever," are translated in the margin of our Bibles, "Thou hast set him to be blessings for ever." This version opens a new and important view of the subject, a view which particularly accords with all the prophecies respecting Christ. It is said again and again concerning him, that "in him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;" and we are well assured, that to communicate blessings to a ruined world is a source of inconceivable happiness to himself. We apprehend that to have been a very principal idea in the mind of the Apostle, when, speaking of Christ, he said, "Who for *the joy that was set before him* endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of Godⁱ."

With what joy must he behold *the myriads who had been exalted to glory* through the virtue of his sacrifice, whilst yet it remained to be offered! It was through "his obedience unto death" that all the antediluvian and patriarchal saints were saved. Our First Parents looked to him as "the Seed of the woman that should bruise the serpent's head." To him righteous Abel had respect, in the offering which was honoured with visible tokens of God's acceptance. To him Noah looked, when he offered the burnt-offerings, from which "God smelled

^d Heb. v. 7. with ver. 2, 4.

^f Phil. ii. 6—8.

^h Phil. ii. 9—11.

^e John i. 1, 18. and xvii. 5.

^g ver. 5.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 2.

a sweet savour^k." In a word, it is through his righteousness that forbearance and forgiveness were exercised from the beginning, just as they will be exercised even to the end: and all who were saved before his advent are in that respect on the same level with those who have been saved since: there is but one song amongst all the glorified saints in heaven; they are all harmonious in singing "to Him that loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood, &c." What a joy must it be to Christ to see in so many myriads the travail of his soul, who "were brought forth, as it were, to God, even before he travailed!" With what joy, too, did he then take upon him to dispense his blessings to the *myriads yet unborn!* He is "Head over all things," not for his own sake merely, but "for the Church's sake." Knowing then how many of his most cruel enemies were given to him by the Father, with what pleasure would he look down upon them, (even while their hands were yet reeking with his blood,) and anticipate their conversion to God by the influence of his Spirit on the day of Pentecost! Every child of man that shall at any period of the world participate his grace, was at that moment before his eyes: and with what delight would he view them, as drawn by his word, as nourished by his grace, as comforted by his Spirit, as made more than conquerors over all their enemies¹ — — — At that moment he saw, as it were, the whole company of the redeemed, the multitudes which no man can number, all enthroned around him, the monuments of his love, the heirs of his glory, the partners of his throne — — — He saw that the kingdom which he had now established upon earth "should never be moved;" that "the gates of hell should never prevail against it;" and that it should stand for ever and ever^m. Well therefore might he say, "The King shall joy in thy strength, O Lord; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice!"]

Having thus explained the psalm, we proceed to,

II. Shew what improvement we should make of it—

From *its literal sense* we learn, how thankful we should be for any blessings vouchsafed unto us—

[In many respects God has "*prevented* us with the blessings of goodness;" and in many he has given them in answer to our prayers. We may "account even his long-suffering towards us to be salvation," and much more the gift of his grace, and the knowledge of his dear Son. Can we reflect on "the salvation to which he has called us," even "the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory," and not be thankful for it? Can we reflect on the exaltation which we ourselves

^k Gen. viii. 20, 21.

¹ Zeph. iii. 17.

^m ver. 7.

have received, from death to life, from slaves to free-men, from children of the devil to sons of God, and not rejoice in it? Can we think of our having been made "kings and priests unto God," "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," yea, partners of his throne, and partakers of his glory for evermore; can we contemplate all this, and not say, "In thy salvation how greatly shall I rejoice?" — — — Verily, if we do not rejoice and shout for joy, "the very stones will cry out against us" — — —]

From *its mystical or prophetical sense* we learn what should be our disposition and conduct towards the Lord Jesus—

[Methinks, we should *rejoice in his joy*. If it were but a common friend that was released from heavy sufferings and exalted to glory, we should rejoice with him in the blessed change: how much more then should we participate in our minds the joy and glory of our adorable Redeemer! — — — But more particularly we should *submit to his government*. This is strongly and awfully suggested in all the latter part of the psalm before us. "God has highly exalted Jesus, that at his name every knee should bow:" yea, he has *sworn*, that every knee *shall* bow to him; and that all who will not bow to the sceptre of his grace, shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron. Read from the text to the end of the psalm; and endeavour to realize every expression in it — — — O that we may be wise ere it be too late! Let us "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish:" for though now he condescends to follow us with entreaties to be reconciled towards him, the time is quickly coming, when he will say, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me."

A further improvement we should make of this subject is, *to confide in his care*. "He is set to be blessings" to a ruined world. He has "ascended up on high that he might fill all things:" "he has received gifts, even for the rebellious;" and "has all fulness treasured up in him," on purpose that we may "receive out of his fulness grace for grace." There is nothing that we can want, but it may be found in him; nor any thing which he is not willing to bestow on the very chief of sinners. Let us then look to him, and trust in him; and assure ourselves, that, as "he lost none that had been given him" in the days of his flesh, so now will he suffer "none to be plucked out of his hands." We cannot expect too much from such a King: however "wide we open our mouths, he will fill them."

To seek the enlargement of his kingdom is the last duty we shall mention as suggested by the subject before us. In the prayer that he has taught us, we say, "Thy kingdom come;" and we close that prayer with ascribing to him "the kingdom,

and the power and the glory, for ever and ever!" and it is with similar sentiments that the psalm begins its conclusion. Let us enter into the spirit of them, saying "Ye that exalted, Lord, in their own strength! ye will no sing and praise thy power." Nothing should be so dear to us as the achievement of his glory. Let us reflect, how we may best promote it, and let the extension of his kingdom be our chief joy! — — —]

* Ps. lxxii. 18, 19.

DXXV.

DAVID IN HIS RETREATMENT.

Ps. xxi. 7. *The king trusted in the Lord, and through the mercy of the Most High he shall not be moved.*

THERE is an inseparable connection between the duties and privileges of a Christian. It is his privilege to enjoy compassure under all difficulties and dangers; but this he cannot possess, unless he repose his confidence in God. Nevertheless in relying upon God his mind shall be kept in perfect peace. David had known the storms of trouble as much as any man; but in the midst of all maintained a full assurance of divine protection. He records his experience in the words before us.

We shall consider them,

I. According to their original import—

This psalm, like many other parts of Scripture, has a double sense—

In an historical view it speaks of David himself—

[David had long been habituated to trust in the Lord. When he was yet a youth, he withstood a lion and a bear in dependence upon God^a; nor feared to encounter him, who filled all the land of Israel with terror^b. During the persecutions of Saul he still held fast his confidence; and, under the most imminent danger and accumulated trouble, encouraged himself in God^c. Sometimes, indeed, his faith for a moment began to fail him^d; but, on the whole, he was "strong in faith, proung glory to God." Nor was he less sensible of his own weakness when he was a king: he still made the Most High

^a 1 Sam. xiii. 36, 37.

^b 1 Sam. xiii. 6.

^c 1 Sam. xvi. 23, 27.

^d 1 Sam. xvi. 1.

his only and continual refuge¹: and God appeared himself faithful to his believing servant. There were indeed some occasions wherein David was greatly "moved"; but these only served more fully to evince the power and faithfulness of his God².

In a *prophetical* sense the words are applicable to Christ—

[The whole psalm has an evident reference to the Messiah. Christ is that "King" who was raised to sit upon the throne of David³; and as for every other good thing, so was he eminent for trust in God. He disregarded the pains of his most powerful enemies⁴; and, undaunted, renewed his trust to those who had lately sought to stone him⁵. He well knew that, till his hour was come, no power on earth could reach him⁶; nor was he ever left destitute of the divine protection. He seemed indeed to be "moved" when "he was crucified through weakness," but he soon showed how vain were the attempts of his adversaries. In his resurrection and ascension he "led captivity itself captive" and he will in due season "put all his enemies under his feet."⁷

In both these views the text sets before us an instructive example—

But we may consider it further,

II. In reference to the present occasion—

The solemnities of this day prove that the former part of the text is exemplified also in our own monarch⁸—

We may therefore hope that the latter part also shall be accomplished in him—

[The religious conduct of kings is of great importance to a nation. Their piety indeed is not more meritorious than that of others; but it is often more beneficial to the community than that of a private person. In the days of old, God paid especial regard to the prayers of princes⁹: even when they were of an abandoned character, he heard them¹⁰. How much

¹ Ps. xli. 2. and lvi. 2—4.

² 2 Sam. xv. 20.

³ 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

⁴ Luke i. 49.

⁵ Luke xiii. 31.

⁶ John xi. 8.

⁷ John xix. 31.

⁸ This was preached on occasion of the king going to St. Paul's to present the colours taken in three different engagements with the French, Spanish, and Dutch fleets.

⁹ 2 Chron. xiv. 11, 12. and xx. 3, 4, 12, 15, 17. and xxxiv. 27. and Isai. xxxviii. 21, 22, 23, 24.

¹⁰ 1 Kings xxi. 29.

more may we hope that he will respect those offered to him this day! "The mercy of the Most High" has hitherto been signally manifested towards us, and if we trust in him it shall yet be continued to us. We say not indeed but that, as a nation, we may be greatly "moved." It is certain that we deserve the heaviest calamities that can fall upon us; but we shall not be given up to ruin if we cry unto God for help. To the end of the world shall that promise be fulfilled to repenting nations^p.]

Sure we are that they who trust in God for spiritual blessings shall never be disappointed—

[Our thoughts on this occasion are not to be confined to temporal concerns. Much as we are interested in national mercies, the welfare of our souls is yet more important: yea, our spiritual progress is the great means of obtaining God's protection to the state. Trust in God therefore, for spiritual blessings, is not foreign to the business of this day. Whatever our political sentiments may be, we are all equally concerned to seek acceptance through Christ. We all need to trust in the promises made to us in him; and, if we do, "the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail against us." Though we have been led captive by our lusts, "we shall have redemption through his blood;" and though we have still to conflict with sin and Satan, we shall be made more than conquerors. The mercy of the Most High shall assuredly be extended to us. Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than that promise fail of accomplishment^q.]

APPLICATION—

[Let us habituate ourselves to view the hand of God in all our mercies, and to trust in him both for personal and national blessings; but let us not think, we trust in God, when in reality we do not. Trust in God necessarily implies a renunciation of all creature-confidence: it also supposes that we sincerely commit our cause to God, and that we plead the promises made to us in his word. If we seek not the Lord in this manner, we trust rather in chance, or in our own vain conceits, than in him. Let us then be earnest in our applications at the throne of grace. Let us be exceeding thankful to God for the mercies we have received, and in every difficulty, temporal or spiritual, confide in him. Thus shall we see an happy issue to our present troubles, and be monuments of God's truth and faithfulness to all eternity.]

^p Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

^q 2 Chron. xx. 20.

DXXVI.

OUR LORD'S COMPLAINT ON THE CROSS.

Ps. xxii. 1. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*

THE prophecies relating to our Lord have not only declared what works he should do, and what sufferings he should endure, but even the very words that should be uttered both by his enemies and himself. Whatever reference the words of the text might have to David, there can be no doubt but that they principally relate to the Lord Jesus; and in him they received their accomplishment: when he had hung about six hours upon the cross, we are told, "he cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli! Eli! lama sabacthani? that is to say, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me^a?" Perhaps he cried with a *loud* voice in order to shew, that his natural strength was by no means exhausted; and that his dissolution, which immediately followed, was voluntary: but he discovered also by that the intenseness of his sufferings, and fulfilled in the minutest manner the prediction before us. Waving all illustration of the text as applicable to David, we shall endeavour to elucidate it as accomplished in his great *antitype*, and shall consider,

I. The occasion of our Lord's complaint—

Jesus, in the hour of his extremity, was forsaken of his heavenly Father—

[We are not to suppose that the godhead actually separated itself from his manhood; but that the sensible manifestation of the divine presence was withheld from him. This was necessary in various points of view. A banishment from the divine presence was part of the punishment due to sin; and therefore it must be inflicted on him who had become the surety and substitute of sinners. Occasional suspensions, also, of the *tokens* of God's love are the means whereby God perfects the work of faith in his people's hearts: and "it behoved Jesus to be made like unto us in all things:" "though he was a son,

^a Matt. xxvii. 46.

yet he must learn" the nature and the difficulty of "obedience (yea, and be made perfect too) through sufferings^b." Nor could he properly sympathize with us, which, as our great High-Priest, he ought to do, unless he himself should endure the very temptations, which we, in our measure, are called to sustain^c.]

But though there was good reason for it, it was a just ground of complaint—

[Never had he endured any thing like this before: when he said, "Now is my soul troubled, it is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," a voice was uttered from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased:" when he agonized in the garden, an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him: but now that he was more fiercely than ever assaulted by all the powers of darkness, his heavenly Father also seemed to conspire with them, and withdrew the only consolation that remained for his support. What a dreadful aggravation of his sufferings must this have been! To cry, and even "roar" for help, and find God "far from helping him!" to have him, in whose bosom he had lain from all eternity, hide his face from him! How could he but complain? Surely in proportion as he loved his heavenly Father, he could not but bewail the hidings of his face.]

Lest however we should form a wrong conception of our Lord's conduct, let us consider,

II. The complaint itself—

Let us not suppose that there was the smallest mixture of impatience in it—

[When our Lord first undertook to stand in the place of sinners, he said, "I delight to do thy will, O God." When the cup of God's wrath was put into his hand, he still acquiesced; and, though his human nature shrunk back for a while from the conflict, he committed himself to God, saying, "Not my will, but thine be done." Nor was the complaint uttered on the cross any other than what every good man, under the hidings of God's face, both *may* and *ought* to utter^d.]

It expressed the fullest confidence in God, and exhibited the brightest pattern to all his tempted people—

[Not for one moment does Jesus doubt his relation to his heavenly Father, as *we* alas! are too apt to do in seasons of

^b Heb. ii. 10, 17, 18. and v. 7—9.

^c Heb. iv. 15.

^d Ps. lxxvii. 1—3. and lxxxviii. 9, 10, 14.

deep affliction. His repetition of that endearing name, "My God! my God!" shews how steadfastly he maintained his faith and confidence; and teaches us, that, "when we are walking in darkness and have no light, we should trust in the Lord, and stay ourselves upon our God."]

We may improve the subject by considering,

III. The lessons we may learn from it—

There is not any part of doctrine or experience which will not receive light from this subject. But we shall content ourselves with observing from it,

1. The greatness of Christ's love—

[Truly the love of Christ has heights and depths that can never be explored. He knew from eternity all that he should endure, yet freely offered himself for us, nor ever drew back from his engagements: "Having loved his own, he loved them to the end." But never shall we form any just conceptions of his love, till we behold that glory which he left for our sakes, and see, in the agonies of the damned, the miseries he endured. But when the veil shall be taken from our eyes, how marvellous will his love appear! and with what acclamations will heaven resound!]

2. The duty of those who are under the hidings of his face—

[Our enjoyment of Christ's presence is variable, and often intermitted: but let us not on that account be discouraged. Let us pray, and that too with strong crying and tears; yea, let us expostulate with him, and ask, like Job, "Wherefore dost thou contend with me?" But though we say, "The Lord hath forsaken me," let us never add, like the Church of old, "my Lord hath *forgotten* me." If he hide himself, "it is but for a little moment, that he may gather us with everlasting mercies^f." Therefore let us say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."]

3. The misery of those who are not interested in his atonement—

[We see what bitter lamentation sin occasioned in him, who bore the iniquities of others, even though he knew that his sufferings would quickly end. What wailing then and gnashing of teeth will they experience, who shall perish under their own personal guilt, when they shall be shut up as monuments of God's wrath to all eternity^g! Would to God that careless sinners would lay this to heart, while yet a remedy remains, and before they be finally separated from their God by an impassable gulf!]

^e Job x. 2.

^f Isai. liv. 7, 8.

^g Luke xxiii. 31.

DXXVII.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Ps. xxii. 11—21. *Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd: and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture. But be not thou far from me, O Lord! O my Strength, haste thee to help me! Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.*

IN many parts of the Psalms there is a strong resemblance between David's experience, and the experience of David's Lord; so that the language used, may properly be applied to both. But in some parts David speaks in terms which are wholly inapplicable to himself, and can be understood only as referring to Christ. This is particularly the case with respect to some expressions in the psalm before us. That a greater than David is here, there can be no doubt. The writers of the New Testament quote many parts of it as literally fulfilled in Christ; in whom alone indeed the words which I have read had any appearance of accomplishment. We scruple not therefore to consider from them,

I. The sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ—

These are strongly marked,

1. In his complaints—

[Great was the number of his enemies, and most inveterate their rage against him. He compares them to fierce "bulls," and savage "lions," and ravenous "dogs." Under the emblem of "the fat bulls of Bashan," he represents the Jewish Governors both in church and state, whilst the populace, both of Jews and Gentiles, were like dogs, set on indeed by others, but actuated by their own native ferocity, and by an insatiable

thirst for blood. All ranks of people combined against him; and not so much as one was found to administer comfort to him, or to assuage his anguish. Of this he complains as a great additional source of grief and sorrow; "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none^a."

Exceeding deep also and various were his sufferings. In *his body* he endured all that the most cruel adversaries could inflict. He complains that his frame was so emaciated that they might "count all his bones;" that "his joints also were dislocated," and "his hands and feet pierced with nails:" and, to complete the scene, whilst he was suspended thus, a naked bloody spectacle upon the cross, some gazed upon him with a stupid unfeeling curiosity ("they look and stare upon me"); and others, with cruel indifference, amused themselves with "casting lots upon his vesture."

Now in no sense whatever were these things at any time fulfilled in David. In relating them, he evidently personates the Messiah, in whom they were fulfilled with the minutest possible precision.

In *his soul* his sufferings were far deeper still. Before ever his body was touched, "his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death^b." And from whence did that anguish proceed but from the hand of the Father, who visited on him the sins of the whole world^c? Yes, this it was which then so oppressed and overwhelmed him: and at the same time all the hosts of hell assaulted him; for "*that* was their hour, and the power of darkness." Under the pressure of these mental agonies, "he was poured out like water," or rather, was consumed, as it were, by fire, as the burnt-offerings were, even with the fire of God's wrath; insomuch that "his heart was like melted wax in the midst of his bowels."]

Of his sufferings we may form a yet further judgment from,

2. His supplications—

[These were offered up in every diversified form, of renovated entreaty, and of urgent pleas: "Be not thou far from me; haste thee to help me: deliver my soul from the sword; save me from the lion's mouth; for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." Now these petitions, I apprehend, related chiefly, if not exclusively, to the sufferings of *his soul*. It was "the Father's sword" that had now awaked against him, to smite him," and it was "the roaring lion," even Satan, with

^a ver. 11. with Ps. lxix. 20. ^b Matt. xxvi. 38. ^c Isai. liii. 10.

all his hosts, that now sought to devour him. In the midst of these accumulated troubles, he felt above all, and deprecated most urgently, the hidings of his Father's face: "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" "O be not far from me, be not far from me, O Lord^d!" The plea, which in this extremity he offered, must not be overlooked; "Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns." At the time of his birth had the Father interposed to deliver him from the murderous rage of Herod; and on many occasions from the Jews who sought his life: and he requested that, if possible, and consistent with the Father's purpose of saving a ruined world, the same protecting hand might be stretched out to save him now; and that the bitter cup, which he was drinking, might be removed from him. If however this could not be vouchsafed to him consistently with the end for which he had come into the world, he was content to drink the cup even to the dregs.

If now the Son of God himself was so pressed with his sufferings, that he besought his Father "with strong crying and tears" either to mitigate the anguish, or to uphold him under it, we can have no doubt but the distress exceeded all that language can express, or that any finite intelligence can adequately conceive.]

Now then ask yourselves, my Brethren, in reference to these sufferings, what should be,

II. The feelings which they should excite in our bosom—

If we beheld but a common man enduring excessive anguish both of body and mind, we could not but feel some measure of sympathy with him: and, if we ourselves had been the occasion of his sufferings, and he were bearing them willingly in our place and stead, we could not but take the liveliest interest in them, both in a way of grief, that we had brought them upon him, and in a way of gratitude to him for sustaining them in our behalf. But this Sufferer was none other than our incarnate God, who came down from heaven on purpose to bear our sins in his own sacred person, that he might deliver us from the condemnation due to them, and procure for us reconciliation with our offended God. Well then may we behold our Saviour,

^d ver. 1, 11, 19.

1. With the deepest humiliation for having occasioned him such anguish—

[Had we never sinned, our adorable Lord would never have assumed our nature, nor borne any of these agonies which we have been contemplating. *In them, therefore, we should read our guilt and misery.* Was he under the hidings of his Father's face? *We* deserve to be banished from the presence of our God to all eternity. Did he suffer inconceivable agonies both of body and soul, under the wrath of Almighty God? *We* merited the utmost extremity of that wrath for ever and ever. Did he suffer even unto death? *We* were obnoxious to everlasting death, even that "second death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Draw near then with me, Brethren, to Gethsemane and to Golgotha, and contemplate with me the scenes which were there exhibited. Do you see in the garden that sufferer, whose agonies of soul are so intense, that the blood issues from every pore of his body? And do you behold him on the mount, stretched upon the cross, and hear his heart-rending cry, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" Say then with yourselves, 'Now I behold what my sins have merited; or, rather, what they merit at this hour. There is not a moment of my life, wherein I might not justly be called upon to drink that bitter cup, without the smallest hope for any, the slightest, mitigation of my woe through eternal ages.' Dear Brethren, this is the glass in which I wish you to behold your own *deserts*. I would not have your eyes turned away from it for one instant to the latest hour of your lives. In viewing particular sins, you may perhaps be led to self-complacency, from the thought that they have not been so enormous as what are habitually committed by others: but in viewing your iniquities as expiated by our blessed Lord, you will see that nothing can exceed your vileness; and you will be ready to take the lowest place as the very "chief of sinners." The best of you, no less than the most abandoned, have merited, and do yet daily merit, at God's hand, all that the Saviour of the world endured for you: and I again say, '*Never look at yourselves in any other glass than this.*']

2. With the liveliest gratitude for sustaining them in your behalf—

[Truly he interposed not thus for the angels when they fell: but for you he undertook and executed this stupendous work of "redeeming you to God by his own precious blood." This, methinks, should fill you with such wonder and love, that you should never be able to think of any thing else. In this mystery are contained "all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge;" and all other things, how beautiful soever in their place, should be swallowed up by it, even as the most brilliant stars are eclipsed by the sun. Hence, this formed the one great topic of St. Paul's preaching; (which he calls "the preaching of the cross;") for "he determined to know nothing amongst his people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified." And in heaven this forms, amongst all the choir of saints and angels, the one subject of their praise. Even angels, I say, unite with the saints in singing "Salvation to God who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever." Oh! Brethren, if our minds were more occupied in exploring the height and depth and length and breadth of redeeming love, we should not be so easily turned away after vain unprofitable controversies as too many are at this day^e — — — This subject will elevate and enlarge the soul, and have a transforming efficacy in proportion as we delight to dwell upon it. Let it only be duly and abidingly impressed upon your minds; and it will prove the power of God to the salvation of your souls.]

^e This is an important hint, and may be followed up, according as there be occasion for it at different times or places in the Christian Church.

DXXVIII.

DAVID'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Ps. xxiii. 1—6. *The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

IN reading the Psalms of David we are apt to think of him as a highly privileged person, whom we can never hope to resemble in the fervour of his piety, or the height of his enjoyments. But, whilst as the anointed King of Israel whom God had so particularly chosen, and as a distinguished prophet of the Lord, he was favoured with communications and supports, which we are not entitled to expect, in his

more private character, as a saint, he possessed no advantage above us. His views of divine truth were far inferior to ours: and his experience of its efficacy was no other than what may be enjoyed by every saint in every age. The psalm before us is a bright specimen of devout affection; and, in point both of composition and sentiment, is universally admired: yet it contains no other recollections than what every Believer's experience must afford, no other confidence than what every saint is warranted to express. Considering David then as a pattern for ourselves, we shall notice,

I. His retrospective acknowledgments—

In recording the mercies of God to him, he speaks of his heavenly Benefactor under the character of,

1. A Shepherd—

[The Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, was David's Lord^a, and David's Shepherd^b: and whatever pertains to the office of a good shepherd, he both executed for him, and will execute for us.

Is it the office of a shepherd *to provide good pasture* for his sheep? O what pasture is provided for us in the sacred records! David in his day could say, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters:" and if he, with so small a portion of the inspired volume in his hands, when the great mystery of redemption was hid under a veil, and the Spirit of God was yet but sparingly bestowed upon the Church, could use such language, how much more may we, who have the meridian light of the Gospel shining around us, and the Holy Ghost poured forth in all his gracious influences, almost without measure! What views have we of the "covenant, that is ordered in all things and sure!" of the prophecies, which have been so minutely fulfilled! and of "the exceeding great and precious promises," which are so suited to all our wants! And how abundant are our consolations, when the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, seals all these truths upon our souls, and witnesses with our spirits that we are the Lord's! — — —

Is it the office of a shepherd *to bring back to the fold his wandering sheep, and to guide them in right paths?* How justly may we unite with David in saying, "He restoreth my soul;

^a Matt. xxii. 42—45.

^b Gen. xlix. 24. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24. John x. 11.

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake?" Mark the words, "*For his name's sake.*" It is his own glory that he has consulted in all his dealings towards us; and especially in that astonishing patience and forbearance which he has exercised towards us from day to day. Our backslidings have been so grievous, and our departures from him so frequent, that we might well have been left to perish in our sins. But he considers that his own honour is involved in the preservation of his sheep; and, therefore, he has never withdrawn his loving-kindness from us, or ceased to watch over us for good. It is on no other principle that we can account for our recoveries when fallen, and our preservation from ten thousand evils into which we should have fallen, if we had not been guided and upheld by him.

Is it the office of a shepherd *to protect his sheep from danger*? This he does, as well for the lambs of his flock, as for those that have attained a greater measure of strength. By "the valley of the shadow of death" we *may* understand a dying hour^c: but we rather understand by it a season of darkness and distress. This is more agreeable to the context, and better accords with the general import of those words in Holy Writ^d. Sheep, in going from mountain to mountain and hill to hill, may easily be supposed to pass occasionally through valleys where dangers affright them, and difficulties obstruct their way: and in this respect the saints resemble them; for however rich their pastures for the most part may be, they find occasional seasons of darkness and gloom. But in such seasons the Lord Jesus Christ, as the great Shepherd and Bishop (Overseer) of souls, is with them, and with his pastoral rod and staff protects them. It is with that rod he numbers them when they come into his fold^e, and with that he secures them from every harm. This he has promised to them in the most express terms^f — — — and he will fulfil it even to the end^g.]

2. A Friend—

[This is a character which God assumed in reference to Abraham^h; and our blessed Lord honours all his faithful disciples with this endearing name: "Henceforth I call you not servants, but friendsⁱ." Now, as the friend of his people, he uses all hospitality towards them. As in the days of old he spread a table for his people in the wilderness, where they could not otherwise have subsisted, so "he prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies." Enemies we have on every side; and such enemies as would deprive us of every blessing, if they

^c Job x. 21, 22.

^d Ps. cvii. 10, 14. Jer. xiii. 16.

^e Lev. xxxvii. 32. Ezek. xxvi. 37.

^f Isai. xliii. 2, 3, 5.

^g Isai. xli. 10.

^h Isai. xli. 8.

ⁱ John xv. 15.

were not restrained by an invisible and almighty power. But our heavenly Friend protects us from their assaults, and gives us an abundant supply of all good things, even "a feast of fat things, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." Nor does he omit any thing which can possibly evince his love towards us. As a Host who delights to honour his guests, he anoints our head with oil; and as the Master of the feast, he fills "our cup" with the richest wine, so that it "runneth over." These figures, though strong and clear, very inadequately represent the communications of his grace, and the consolations of his Spirit. David, in another psalm, says, "The Lord himself is the portion of my inheritance and my cup^k:" and when this is the case, can it be matter of surprise that "our cup runneth over?" No indeed; for there is nothing on this side of heaven that can be compared with the manifestations of his love. Truly, "in his favour is life; and his loving-kindness is better than life itself."]

Whilst acknowledging thus the goodness of God to him in past times, the Psalmist does not hesitate to proclaim,

II. His prospective consolations—

These pervade the whole psalm, and arise out of every truth contained in it. Three of his assertions in particular we shall notice:

1. "I shall not want"—

[With such a Shepherd, and such a Friend, how could he want; or what can any one so privileged ever stand in need of? Does he not know all our wants? and is he not able to supply them^l? Has he not absolutely pledged himself to supply them? and is there not an inexhaustible fulness treasured up in him *on purpose* that he may supply them? Do we need a righteousness wherein we may stand before God? "The righteousness of Christ shall be unto all and upon all them that believe"— — — Do we need grace to mortify all our corruptions, and to fulfil the whole will of God? "His grace shall be sufficient for us"— — — Do we need peace in our troubled breasts? He has left us peace as a legacy; "Peace I leave with you: my peace give I unto you:" yea, "He himself will be our peace"— — — Even of temporal things he has said, that "they who fear him shall want no manner of thing that is good^m." Whether we look to the blessings of time or the glories of eternity, it is every believer's privilege to say, I shall not want."]

^k Ps. xvi. 5.

^l Phil. iv. 19.

^m Ps. xxxiv. 10.

2. "I will not fear"—

[It were presumptuous in the extreme for any one to use such an expression as this, if he looked only to an arm of flesh: for "of ourselves we have no sufficiency even to think a good thought:" but, with such a protector as the Lord Jesus, we may laugh all our enemies to scorn. We know how powerful, how subtle, how malignant is that "roaring lion that seeketh to devour us;" and we know that we are as weak and impotent in ourselves as sheep: but if David, a man like ourselves, slew a lion and a bear that invaded his father's flock, what shall not Jesus effect in our defence? Who shall escape his eye, or who shall withstand his arm? Hear what our Lord himself says; "My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places; when it shall hail, coming down on the forest, and the city shall be low in a low place".] Let the timid then dismiss their fears, from whatever source they may arise. "I will fear *no* evil," said the Psalmist; and we, whether we take a general view of our enemies, or enter into a distinct enumeration of them, may adopt the same triumphant language^o — — — If "we know in whom we have believed, we may be assured that he will keep that which we have committed to him against that glorious day," when all his flock shall be gathered together, and be one fold under one shepherd.]

3. Of my happiness there shall be no end—

[Behold how confidently the Psalmist speaks on this subject! "*Surely* goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." What! hast thou no doubt about this great matter? No: it shall be *surely* so. Art thou not presumptuous in speaking thus in relation to thyself? No: it shall be thus to *me*. But would it not be abundantly sufficient to say, that goodness and mercy shall not turn away from thee? No: they *shall follow* me, and that too "all the days of my life:" they shall follow me, even as my shadow does, wherever I go; "goodness," to supply my wants; and "mercy," to cover my defects. And art thou bold enough to carry this confidence beyond the grave? Yes: "*I will dwell* in the house of the Lord *for ever*;" not only serving him in his house below, but enjoying and glorifying him in his house above.

Behold here the felicity of the Saints! All the rest of the world are *following after happiness*, and it eludes their grasp: but those who believe in Jesus have *happiness following after them*: "goodness and mercy" are their attendant angels, that never for a moment turn aside from them, or relax their attention to them.

ⁿ Isai. xxxii. 18, 19. ^o Ps. xlv. 1—3. Rom. viii. 35—39.

The ignorant world have no idea of this blessed truth : they would account it almost blasphemy to utter such language as this. But the reason is, they know not what a Shepherd, and what a Friend, we have : did they but duly appreciate his love, they would know, that nothing within the sphere of our necessities to require, or of his ability to grant, is too great for us to expect at his gracious hands.

Enlarge then your expectations, all ye who are of the fold of Christ : learn to estimate aright your privileges : see them yet more distinctly stated by the Holy Psalmist^p — — — and look forward to the full enjoyment of them in that house, where the same adorable Saviour that now ministers unto you, will continue his ministrations to all eternity^q.]

^p Ps. xci. 15—17.

^q Rev. vii. 15—17.

DXXIX.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST TYPIFIED.

Ps. xxiv. 7—10. *Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory ? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates ; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory ? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of glory.*

THE various rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were extremely useful to the Jews, not merely as means whereby they were to serve their God, but as vehicles of instruction to their minds. It is true indeed that the instruction which would be conveyed by them was very imperfect ; but still it was such as best suited their infant minds, and such as was well calculated to stir up in them a desire after a fuller comprehension of the things contained in them : they were to the nation at large what the parables of our Lord were to the Scribes and Pharisees of his day ; they were means of fixing the attention of the people, and of stimulating them to inquiry. But to us, who have the true light reflected on those things, they are of far greater value : for, seeing them in connexion with the things typified by them, we behold a fitness and a beauty in them, which the people

of God under the Jewish dispensation could have no idea of. Let us illustrate this from the psalm before us. This psalm was written on the occasion of carrying up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion. The ark was the symbol of the Divine presence: and the carrying it up in so solemn and triumphant a way conveyed to the spectators this important truth, that to have God nigh unto them, where he might be sought and consulted at all times, even in the very midst of them, was an inestimable privilege. But *we* behold in that ceremony the ascension of our blessed Lord to the heavenly Zion, whither he is gone for the benefit of all his waiting people. The character by which he is described is infinitely more intelligible to us than it could be to those who lived before his advent, and the benefit to be derived from his elevation is proportionably more clear. This will appear whilst we consider,

I. The character here given of our ascended Lord—

His ascension, as we have already said, was here represented—

[The priests, with the Levites who bare the ark, demanded, in elevated strains, admission for it within the tabernacle that had been reared for its reception. The terms used, though not strictly applicable to the tabernacle, were proper to it in a figurative sense, as representing the heaven of heavens, the peculiar residence of the Deity. In this view it is said, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors!” The Levites within the tabernacle, on hearing this demand, are represented as inquiring in whose behalf it is made, and who this King of glory is. The reply being satisfactory to those who had the charge of the tabernacle, the ark is borne in, and deposited in the place prepared for it.

Agreeably to this representation we may conceive of Jesus at his ascension, attended by a host of ministering angels, who, on their arrival at the portals of heaven, demand admission for their Divine Master. The angels within inquire who that *man* can be in whose behalf such a claim is made. Twice is the inquiry made, and twice the answer is returned; and on the entrance of the Lord into those heavenly mansions we may conceive that the whole celestial choir unite in one exulting acclamation, “The King of glory! the King of glory!”]

But the character here given of him deserves more attentive consideration—

[The essential dignity of our Lord is that first mentioned. As “the King of glory,” and “the Lord of glory,” he could claim heaven as his own. There he had from all eternity been “in the bosom of the Father:” there he had “had a glory with the Father before the worlds were made.” “From thence he had descended,” for the purpose of executing the Father’s will. Though he had assumed our nature, and “was found in fashion as a man,” yet was he from all eternity “in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God.” He was “the brightness of his Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” He was “one with God,” in glory equal, in majesty co-eternal: in a word, he was “the mighty God,” “the great God and our Saviour,” “God over all, blessed for evermore.” Well therefore might his attendant angels call on the hosts of heaven to open wide the portals of those glorious mansions for his admission; since the heaven of heavens were from all eternity his proper, his peculiar residence.

But he is further described as “the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.” The reason of his descent from heaven had been to rescue a ruined world from the dominion of sin and Satan, death and hell. “The god of this world” had his vassals in complete subjection: as “a strong man armed he kept his house, and all his goods were in peace.” But Jesus entered into conflict with him, and “bound him and spoiled his goods;” or, in other words, delivered from his sway millions of the human race, who had not only been “led captive by him at his will,” but would ultimately have been “bound with him in chains of everlasting darkness.” True indeed, he himself received a wound in the engagement; (“his heel was bruised:”) but he inflicted a deadly wound on “the head” of his enemy^a, and vanquished him for ever. It may be said indeed that he himself died in the conflict: he did so, and appeared to be “crucified through weakness:” but it was not through weakness that he died, but in compliance with his own engagement to “make his soul an offering for sin.” His death was to be the very means of victory: it was “through death that he overcame him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and delivered them who through fear of death were all their life-time subject to bondage.” On his cross he not only “spoiled all the principalities and powers of hell, but made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it:” and in his ascension “he led them captive,” bound, as it were, to his chariot-wheels. This constituted a further claim to the

^a Gen. iii. 15.

mansions of heaven. It had been covenanted on his Father's part, that after his conflicts on earth he should be raised in his manhood to the right hand of God, and that, thus enthroned, he should put every enemy under his feet^b. This was now to be fulfilled: the victory was gained: and nothing now remained to complete the glorious work but the installation of Messiah on his promised throne. Hence the exulting reply to the inquiry, "Who is this King of glory?" "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle; the Lord of Hosts, HE is the King of glory!" and, as such, he comes to take possession of his throne, and calls on all the hosts of heaven to celebrate and adorn his triumphs.]

But to participate the joy expressed in our text, we should understand—

II. The interest we have in his ascension—

It is not as a private individual that he has ascended, for then we should have mourned as Elisha did for Elijah, and as the Apostles were disposed to do, when he advertised them of his intentions to depart from them. But we have reason rather to rejoice in his departure, yea, far more than if he had continued upon earth to the present hour^c: for he is ascended,

1. As our Great High Priest—

[The office of the High Priest was but half performed when he had slain the sacrifice: he must carry the blood within the veil, to sprinkle it upon the Mercy-seat; and he must burn incense also before the Mercy-seat. Now our blessed Lord was to execute every part of the priestly office; and therefore he must carry his own blood within the veil, and present also before the Mercy-seat the incense of his continual intercession. Agreeably to this we are told, "that by his own blood he is entered into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;" that "he is gone to appear in the presence of God for us;" and that "he ever liveth to make intercession for us^d." What a blessed thought is this! Have I a doubt whether my sins shall be forgiven? Behold, he is at this very moment pleading in his Father's presence the merit of his blood, which is a sufficient "propitiation not for my sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world." Have I a doubt whether God will hear my unworthy petitions? Behold, Jesus, my Great High Priest, will secure, by his own prevailing intercession, an everlasting acceptance both of my person and services at the hands of Almighty God.]

^b Ps. cx. 1. ^c John xiv. 28. ^d Heb. vii. 25. and ix. 12, 24.

2. As our living Head—

[Jesus is the Head and Representative of his people; inso-much that they may not improperly be said to be even at this time “sitting in and with him in heavenly places^e.” But he is also our Head of vital influence, having all fulness of spiritual blessings treasured up in him, in order that we may receive out of it according to our necessities^f. Adam at first had, as it were, a treasure of grace committed to his own custody; and he lost it even in Paradise. How much more then should we lose it, who are corrupt creatures in a corrupt world, if it were again left in our own keeping! But God has now taken more effectual care for us. He has given us into the hands of his own Son: and our life is now placed out of the reach of our great Adversary; “it is hid with Christ in God.” Do we want wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification, or complete redemption? it is all treasured up for us in Christ, who “is made all unto us^g.” It is out of his inexhaustible fulness that we all receive^h: and, as the sun in the firmament is the one source of all the light that we, or any other of the planets, receive, so is Christ, of all the spiritual blessings that are enjoyed on earth: “He is head over all things to the Church;” and “he *fillet* *all in all*ⁱ.”]

3. As the Forerunner of all his people—

[By that very name is he called, in reference to his entrance within the veil^k. Indeed previous to his departure he expressly told his disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them, in order at a future period to come and take them to himself, that they might be with him for ever^l. He is gone up to heaven as the first-fruits, which sanctified and assured the whole harvest^m. Soon is he coming again from thence, to take home his people who wait for him. Not one will he leave behind. At whatever period or place they died, they “shall hear his voice,” they shall “meet him in the air, they shall be ever with the Lordⁿ.” When he was upon the earth he appeared like other men, and died laden with the iniquities of a ruined world: but in due time he will appear again, without sin, in all the glory of his Father and of his holy angels, to the complete and everlasting salvation of all who look for him^o. “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”]

IMPROVEMENT—

^e Eph. ii. 6.^f Col. ii. 9.^g 1 Cor. i. 30.^h John i. 16.ⁱ Eph. i. 22, 23.^k Heb. vi. 19, 20.^l John xiv. 2, 3.^m 1 Cor. xv. 20.ⁿ John v. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.^o Heb. ix. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 18.

Is our blessed Lord ascended to the highest heavens? then,

1. Let our affections be where He is—

[This is the improvement which St. Paul himself teaches us to make of this subject^p — — — What is there worth a thought, in comparison of this adorable Saviour, who has died for us, and is yet every moment occupied in the great work of our salvation, exerting all his influence with the Father in our behalf, and communicating continually to our souls all needful supplies of grace and strength? — — —]

2. Let our dependence be upon him—

[It may be said, that, having been quickened from the dead, we have now a new and spiritual life within us; but it must not be forgotten, that the life we have is not so committed to us, that we have it in, and of, ourselves: as light in our dwellings is derived from, and altogether dependent on, the sun in the firmament, so is the life that is infused into our souls entirely derived from, and dependent on, the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence St. Paul says, “I live: yet not I; but Christ liveth in me:” and then he adds, “And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me^q.” Thus it must be with us: we must remember that “all our fresh springs are in HIM:” and from him must we derive all our vital energy, as branches from the stock, and as members from the head. A life of faith on HIM is equally necessary for every human being: in ourselves we are all wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and to him must we equally be indebted for eye-salve to restore our sight, for raiment to cover us, and for gold to enrich our souls^r. To him must we go for it from day to day; and from him must we obtain it, “without money and without price^s.”]

3. Let us be looking forward to, and preparing for, a similar entrance into his glory—

[St. Paul assures us, that “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory^t.” Yes; as soon as ever the judgment shall be past, then shall he, at the head of his redeemed people, demand admission for them all into the highest heavens: “Lift up, &c. &c. and the King of glory, *with all his redeemed*, shall enter in.” What shouts will then resound throughout all the courts of heaven! “The King of glory! The King of glory!” No other name will then be heard but that of our Redeeming God, to whom all possible

^p Col. iii. 1, 2. with Phil. iii. 17, 20.

^q Gal. iii. 20.

^r Rev. iii. 17, 18. ^s Isai. lv. 1.

^t Col. iii. 3, 4.

“praise and honour and glory will be ascribed, even to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.”
 “Look then for this glorious period, and haste unto it,” as the consummation of all your hopes, and the completion of all your joys^u: and by adding virtue to virtue, and grace to grace, ensure to yourselves an entrance, not like that of a mere wreck, but like a ship in full sail, even “an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ^x.”]

^u 2 Pet. iii. 12.

^x 2 Pet. i. 5, 10, 11.

DXXX.

THE SAINT PLEADING WITH GOD.

Ps. xxv. 6, 7. *Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me, for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.*

AT what precise period this psalm was written, is not certainly known; but probably about the time of Absalom's rebellion. It is evident that David's sorrows were very great^a: but those which appear to have pressed with the greatest weight upon his mind arose from a view of his past transgressions, and probably from that flagrant iniquity committed by him in the matter of Uriah^b. His mode of pleading with God is that to which I propose, in a more especial manner, to draw your attention, because it affords an excellent pattern for us, in all our approaches to the throne of grace.

Let us notice,

I. What he desires—

He desires God to “remember the tender mercies and loving-kindnesses” with which he had favoured him in times past. Now this is almost the last petition which we should have expected from a person mourning under a sense of sin, because the kindness of God to us forms one of the greatest aggravations of our sins. God himself made this the ground of his complaint against his people of old: “What could I have done more for my vineyard, that I have not done

^a ver. 16, 17.

^b ver. 11, 18.

in it? and wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" But David had a just view of God's tender mercies: he regarded them as pledges of yet richer blessings in reserve for him: and in this view his request deserves particular attention.

God's mercies are the fruits of his electing love—

[God dispenses his blessings to whomsoever he will. He has a right to do so: for there is no creature in the universe that has any claim upon him. As well might the devils complain of him, for not giving to *them* a Saviour, as any of us complain of him for not bestowing on *us* the grace which he imparts to others. In what he does, he consults his own glory alone: and, however rebellious man may arraign his counsels, he will be eternally glorified in all that he has done: it will all be found "to his praise and honour and glory" in "the day which he has appointed for the revelation of his righteous judgments." David was sensible of his obligations to God in this respect. He traced all his mercies to their proper source, the eternal counsels of the Deity; who had vouchsafed them to him, not for any righteousness of his, either seen or foreseen, but "according to his own purpose and grace, which had been given him in Christ Jesus before the world began^c." He saw that "God had loved him with an everlasting love," and therefore with loving-kindness had he drawn him to the actual enjoyment of his favour.]

In this view they may be regarded as pledges of future blessings—

[God is unchangeable, no less in his counsels than in his perfections^d. In no respect is there with him "any variable-ness, or shadow of turning^e." "His gifts and calling are without repentance^f." Hence, if he remember his former mercies, he will continue them. "He will not forsake his people for his great name's sake, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^g." He has said, "I will never, never leave you; never, never forsake you^h:" so that, if we have indeed experienced his loving-kindness in our souls, we may "confidently hope that he will carry on and perfect his work within usⁱ:" for "whom he loveth, he loveth to the end^k."

Here, then, we see what was in the mind of David when he urged this petition. He had found consolation from this thought in the midst of the deepest distresses. When tempted,

^c 2 Tim. i. 9.

^d Mal. iii. 6.

^e Jam. 1. 17.

^f Rom. xi. 29.

^g 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^h Heb. xiii. 5.

ⁱ Phil. i. 6.

^k John xiii. 1.

on one occasion, to think that "God had cast him off, and would be favourable to him no more, but had in anger shut up his tender mercies, so that his promise would fail for evermore," he "called to mind God's wonders of old time," and thus composed his mind, and assured himself that his fears were groundless, the result only of "his own infirmity¹." In any troubles, therefore, which we may experience, we shall do well to look back upon God's mercies of old, and to take encouragement from them to cast ourselves upon him, for the continuance of them.]

Let us next observe,

II. What he deprecates—

Sin, in whomsoever it is found, is most offensive to God—

[God "cannot look upon iniquity without the utmost abhorrence^m," both of the act itself, and of the person who has committed it. Hence, when he forgives sin, he "blots it out, even as a morning cloud, which passes away, and is no more seenⁿ." God has put it altogether out of his own sight; he has "cast it behind his back^o," "into the very depths of the sea^p," from whence it shall never be brought up again. If it were remembered by him, he must punish it: and therefore, to those who turn unto him, and lay hold on his covenant, he promises, that "their sins and iniquities he will remember no more^q."]]

On this account David deprecates the remembrance of his sins—

[He specifies, in particular, "the sins of his youth," which, though committed through levity and thoughtlessness, were displeasing to God, and must entail his judgments on the soul. Little do young people think what their views of their present conduct will be, when God shall open their eyes, whether it be in the present or the future life. They now imagine that they have, as it were, a licence to indulge in sin, and to neglect their God. They conceive, that serious piety at their age would be premature and preposterous; and that, if they only abstain from gross immoralities, they may well be excused for deferring to a later period the habits that are distasteful to a youthful mind. But these are vain and delusive imaginations. God views their conduct with other eyes. He admits not those frivolous excuses with which men satisfy their own minds. He sees no reason why the earlier part of life should be consecrated to Satan, and the dregs of it alone

¹ Ps. xlii. 6. and lxxvii. 6—11. ^m Hab. i. 13. ⁿ Isai. xlv. 22.

^o Isai. xxxviii. 17.

^p Mic. vii. 19. ^q Heb. viii. 12.

be reserved for him. He demands the first-fruits as his peculiar portion; and if the first-fruits of the field, much more the first-fruits of the immortal soul. O! my young friends, I entreat you to reflect how different God's estimate of your conduct is from that which you and your thoughtless companions form; and how bitterly you will one day deprecate *his* remembrance of those sins, which now you pass over as unworthy of any serious consideration.

But David adverts also to the transgressions which, through weakness or inadvertence, he yet daily committed. And who amongst us is not conscious of manifold transgressions in his daily walk and conversation? Who is not constrained to say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord:" "if thou shouldest be extreme to mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?" Thus, then, let us also implore God to blot out our sins from the book of his remembrance, that they may never appear against us in the day of judgment, and, "if sought for" with ever so much diligence, may never, "never be found^r."]

Let us mark yet farther,

III. What he proposes as the rule and measure of God's dealings with him—

On the mercy of God he founds all his hope—

[Mercy is the favourite attribute of the Deity: it delights to spare the offending, and to save the penitent. It is ready to fly at the call of guilt and misery; and hastens to execute the dictates of God's sovereign grace. It demands no merit as the price of its blessings: it accounts itself richly recompensed in bringing glory to God and happiness to man. Hence David prayed, "According to thy mercy, remember thou me!" When speaking of God's interposition between him and his persecutors, he could say, "The Lord hath rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me^s." But he would not presume to make his own righteousness the ground of his hope towards God. For acceptance with him, he would rely on nothing but mercy, even the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Herein he has set us an example which we shall do well to follow: in all our addresses to the Most High God, we should adopt his prayer, and say, "Deal with thy servant according to thy mercy^t." There is solid ground. Thither the most holy of the saints must come; and there the vilest sinner upon earth may find a rock whereon to stand with confidence before God. With such a ground of hope, David could approach his God, and say, "Be merciful unto my sin; *for it is great!*"]

^r Jer. l. 20.

^s Ps. xviii. 20.

^t Ps. cxix. 124.

From “the goodness of God, too,” he derives his only plea—

[David well knew that God is most glorified in those exercises of mercy which most display his sovereignty and his grace. Hence he desired that God would have respect to his own honour, and shew mercy to him for his goodness’ sake. Thus must we, also, take our arguments from the perfections of our God; and have all our hope, and plea, and confidence in him alone.]

To this I will only ADD,

1. Let us follow the example of David—

[We all have need to come to God precisely in the manner that David did. We have no more worthiness in ourselves than he. If judged by any thing of our own, we can have no hope whatever. We must stand precisely on the same ground as he, and urge the very same pleas as he. Our first, and last, and only cry must be,

“ Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask ;

This is the total sum :

For mercy, Lord, is all my plea :

O let thy mercy come ^u ! ”

2. Let us take encouragement from the acceptance which he found—

[His sins, great as they were, were all forgiven. And when did God ever reject the prayer of faith? To whom did he ever say, “ Seek ye my face in vain ? ” Read the whole of the fifty-first psalm, and let it be a model for your supplications, day and night. Then shall your prayer come up with acceptance before God, and your seed-time of tears issue in a harvest of eternal joy.]

^u See the Lamentation of a Sinner, at the end of the Liturgy ; and compare Ps. li. 1.

DXXXI.

MEEK DOCILITY INCULCATED.

Ps. xxv. 9. *The meek will he guide in judgment ; and the meek he will teach his way.*

THE necessity of a revelation is universally acknowledged : for no man could possibly know God’s will, unless God himself should be pleased to communicate information respecting it from above. But the necessity for any divine influence upon the soul, in order to a due improvement of a revelation already

given, is not generally admitted. But we are expressly told, that "all God's children shall be taught of him:" and both the goodness and integrity of God are pledged for the performance of the promise^a. There are, however, certain qualifications which we must possess, before the proffered benefits can be extended to us: and what they are, it is my intention, in this present Discourse, to set before you.

Let me then state,

I. What dispositions are necessary for a reception of divine truth—

The term "meekness" is of very extensive import. But, instead of entering into the variety of senses in which the word is used, we shall find it more profitable to confine ourselves to the precise view in which it is used in the passage before us. Men may be denominated "meek,"

1. When they are sensible of their own ignorance—

[Ignorant we are, whether we be sensible of it or not. The fall of man has proved no less injurious to his intellectual powers than to his heart. "His understanding is darkened:" "the god of this world has blinded his eyes:" and "he is alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in him, and because of the blindness of his heart."

But men are unconscious of this. They feel that their powers are strong for the investigation of human sciences; and they see no reason why they should not be equally so for the comprehension of things relating to the soul. Any intimation to this effect they are ready to resent, as the Pharisees did of old: "Are *we* blind also?"^b

Very different is their conduct, when they are become truly "meek." Then they perceive their want of spiritual discernment^c. They feel that no efforts of flesh and blood will suffice for the illumination of their minds^d; and that they need "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that they may know the things that are freely given to them of God^e."

2. When they are willing and desirous to be taught of God—

[As man by nature is not sensible of his own blindness, so has he no wish to obtain a spiritual insight into the things of

^a ver. 8.

^b John ix. 40.

^c 2 Cor. ii. 14.

^d Matt. xvi. 17.

^e 1 Cor. ii. 12.

God. He is satisfied with a speculative knowledge: and, if he possess that which may be apprehended by reason, and which may be attained by his own personal exertions, he has all that he desires. All beyond that is, in his estimation, a vain conceit.

But a person who possesses the disposition spoken of in our text, desires to be taught of God, and to be guided into all truth. He is not contented with abiding in the outer court of the temple; but longs to be introduced within the veil, even into the sanctuary of the Most High, in order that he may behold God shining forth in all his glory, and receive from him the richest possible communications of his grace and love. For this end, whenever he opens the inspired volume, he lifts up his heart to God, and prays, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy Law!" In relation to the whole work of redemption, whether as revealed in the word, or as experienced in the soul, he desires to hear God himself, and be "taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus^f:" and he pleads with God that most encouraging promise, "Call upon me, and I will shew thee great and mighty (*hidden*) things, which thou knowest not^g."]

Such are the dispositions which characterize the people whom God will instruct.

We are next to shew,

II. Whence arises the necessity for them—

There is, in the whole scope and tenor of the Gospel,

1. A contrariety to our carnal reason—

[The substitution of God's co-equal, co-eternal Son in the place of sinners, his vicarious sacrifice, his bringing in a righteousness by the imputation of which sinners may be justified before God, and his imparting all the blessings of redemption to them, through the exercise of faith, and without any respect whatever to their works; these are truths to which carnal reason is extremely averse. They are among "those things of the Spirit which the natural man neither does, nor can, receive." A man may, indeed, adopt these things as his creed, and may account an opposition to them heresy; whilst yet he has no spiritual acquaintance with them in his own soul: but to see the excellency of them, to love them, to delight in them, to "account all things but dung for the knowledge of them," is an attainment which the natural man has no idea of, and which, instead of desiring, he hates. They form altogether a mystery. Hence, till he is humbled before God, he cannot possibly

^f Eph. iv. 20, 21.

^g Jer. xxxiii. 3.

comprehend these things: they are a stumbling-block to him; they are mere "foolishness" in his eyes.]

2. An opposition to our depraved appetites—

[The Gospel calls upon us to "mortify our members upon earth," yea, and to "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts:" and to such an extent does it require the subjugation of our corrupt appetites, that, if there be a thing dear to us as a right eye, it calls upon us to pluck it out, or a thing useful as a right hand, to cut it off. Now, how can such doctrines as these be received by a proud, unmortified, and unhumbled spirit? It is not possible but that there should be the utmost repugnance to them in all who feel not the value of their own souls, and desire not above all things to obtain peace with God. In truth, the doctrines of Christianity are not a whit more offensive to the reason of the natural man, than the duties of it are to his corrupt affections; which, therefore, must be mortified, before he can acquiesce in them as good and right.]

3. An inconsistency with our worldly interests—

[The instant we embrace the Gospel with our whole hearts, the world will become our enemies. They hated and persecuted the Lord of glory himself: can we suppose that the disciple will be above his Lord, or that, if they called the Master of the house Beelzebub, they will not find some opprobrious names for those also of his household? We are taught by our Lord that we must be hated of all men for his name's sake; and that, if we will not take up our cross daily, and follow him, we cannot be his disciples. Nay more; if we be not willing to forsake all, and even to lay down our lives for him, we cannot be partakers of his salvation. But what will an earthly mind say to this? Will not a faithful declaration of these things draw forth that reply which was given to our Lord, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Many, when our Lord proclaimed these things, turned back, and walked no more with him: and this cannot but be the result with every carnal and worldly mind, when such sacrifices are required.

Hence, then, it is evident, that, unless a very great change be wrought in the heart of an unconverted man, he neither will, nor can, be in a state to receive truths to which his whole nature is so averse. If he really desired to do God's will, the film would be removed from his eyes, and he would be able to appreciate the things which are set before him in the Gospel: but, till he becomes thus "meek" and docile, he will be inaccessible to the light, or rather, the light itself will only augment his blindness.]

That all may be encouraged to seek these necessary dispositions, I proceed to notice,

III. The promise made to those who are possessed of them—

It has already appeared, that men, by the Fall, have suffered loss both in their intellectual and moral powers. And, in both respects, shall they be restored to a rich measure of their pristine dignity, if only they cultivate the dispositions which God requires.

1. God will “guide them in judgment”—

[They see at present through a dense and delusive medium: and hence every thing relating to God assumes, in their eyes, an odious and distorted shape. But God will rectify their views: he will enable them to discern every thing in its proper colours, and to see its bearings on the welfare of the soul. The excellency of salvation through a crucified Redeemer, the blessedness of having all our corruptions mortified, and the wisdom of sacrificing all our worldly interests to the welfare of the soul; these, and all other truths connected with them, shall be brought home to the mind with an evidence which it cannot doubt, and with a power which it cannot withstand: or, to use the expressive language of the Psalmist, “In the hidden part God shall make them to know wisdom^h.” In a word, he will bring the soul out of darkness into marvellous light; so that it shall no more call evil good, and good evil, but shall “be guided into all truth,” and shall “have the very mind that was in Christ Jesus.”]

2. He will enable them, also, to walk in his ways—

[Truth shall not float in their minds as a mere theory or speculation, but shall influence their every act, their universal habit. God will, by his word and Spirit, reduce them from their wanderings, and guide their feet into the way of peace. And, if at any time they be for a moment turned aside through error of judgment, or instability of mind, he will cause them to “hear a word behind them, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it.” He will go before them, as he did before the Israelites in the wilderness, causing his word to be a light to their feet and a lantern to their paths: and thus “he will guide them by his counsel, until he shall finally receive them to glory.”]

Here, then, we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that the blessings of the Gospel are so pre-eminently enjoyed by the poor—

^h Ps. li. 6.

[It is a fact, that "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble, are called;" but that "God has revealed to babes and sucklings the things which, to so great an extent, are hid from the wise and prudent." The wise and great are too generally under the influence of self-sufficiency and self-dependence. They cannot bow to the humiliating doctrines of the Gospel: they will not endure to view themselves in so destitute a condition as the Gospel represents them. Hence they, almost universally, "stumble at the word, being disobedient." But the poor are easily brought to see that they need instruction from above: their very incompetency to enter into deep researches of any kind gives them a comparative diffidence of their own powers, in relation to the things of God. Hence they see but little to stumble at even in those points which the wise and learned find most difficult to overcome: and, being more easily brought to seek instruction from God, they, in far greater numbers, are taught of God, and almost engross to themselves, as it were, the possession of his kingdom. O, ye poor, never repine at your lot; but rather rejoice that you are of the happy number of those whom God has chosen chiefly, though not exclusively, "to be rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom." And, ye rich or learned, seek to "become as little children," and be willing to "become fools, that ye may be truly wise."]

2. Whence it is that there are so many falls and errors in the religious world—

[People, when they have embraced the truth, are but too apt to lose the simplicity of their earlier days, and to become wise in their own conceits. Hence many of them fall into errors of divers kinds; and not unfrequently dishonour, by their conduct, their holy profession. Alas! alas! what a picture does the religious world present! See what controversies and animosities obtain amongst those who profess themselves children of one common Father! Dear Brethren, dreadful is the advantage which our great adversary gains by these means. Remember, I pray you, that your growth in grace is to be shewn, not by a proud dogmatizing spirit, but by a spirit of meekness, and humility, and love. He is most acceptable to the Lord Jesus, who most resembles a little child: and he shall have the richest communications from God, who, with most lowliness of heart, implores his continual aid. In reading the Holy Scriptures therefore, and under the public ministration of the word, be careful not to lean to your own understanding, but to trust in God for the teaching of his good Spirit; that "receiving the word with meekness, as an engrafted word," you may find it effectual to sanctify and "save your souls."]

DXXXII.

GOD'S PATHS ARE MERCY AND TRUTH.

Ps. xxv. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.*

IT has often been observed, that there is in the world an indiscriminate distribution of good and evil, without any respect to men's moral characters. And this is confirmed by Solomon, who says, "All things come alike to all, neither knoweth any man love or hatred by all that is before him." This, however, must be understood with certain limitations and restrictions: for, as in chemical preparations one ingredient will entirely change the qualities of the thing prepared, so in the dispensations of Providence will one single ingredient wholly change their nature, while, in appearance, they remain the same. God often sends temporal blessings to his enemies in anger, as he raised up Pharaoh to a throne, for the purpose of displaying in him the power of his wrath. On the contrary, the bitterest cup that he puts into the hands of his friends is mixed with love. The eye of faith therefore will discern a most essential difference, where sense and reason can see none: it will see, that however God may load the wicked with benefits, "he is angry with them every day;" and that however he may visit the righteous with the rod, "all his paths are mercy and truth unto them." To elucidate this truth, let us consider,

I. The character of the godly—

Among the numberless marks whereby the godly are described in Scripture, there are not any more deserving of our attention than those before us:

1. They keep God's covenant—

[The covenant here spoken of cannot be the covenant of works, because no man is able to keep that, seeing that it requires perfect and unsinning obedience. We understand it therefore as relating to the covenant of grace, wherein God undertakes to give us pardon, holiness, and glory, for the sake of his dear Son, who is the Mediator of it, and in whose blood it is ratified and confirmed^a.

^a Compare Jer. xxxi. 31—34. with Heb. viii. 10—12.

Now this covenant every godly person “keeps.” He embraces it gladly, being well persuaded, that if the tenor of it were not precisely what it is, he could have no hope. If the covenant required the performance of certain conditions on his part, without providing him with strength to perform those conditions, and pardon for his innumerable failures and defects, he would sit down in despair. But seeing that “the covenant is ordered in all things and sure,” and that Jesus, the surety of it, has guaranteed to God the accomplishment of its demands, and to us the enjoyment of its blessings, every believer rejoices in it, and cleaves to it steadfastly with his whole heart.]

2. They keep God’s testimonies—

[While the believer is thus attached to the Gospel covenant, he does not relax his obedience to the law. On the contrary, whatever God has testified to be his will, *that* the believer labours to fulfil. He would not wish to live in sin, though he might do it with impunity: nor does he account one of the commandments grievous: but rather he esteems them all concerning all things to be right^b. His complaints are not against the law as too strict, but against his own heart, as treacherous and vile. With respect to the testimonies of God, he says, with David, “I claim them as mine heritage for ever; yea, they are the rejoicing of my heart; they are sweeter to me than honey and the honey-comb.”

Such, in other parts of God’s word, is the description given of the godly^c. We should therefore inquire into our faith and practice, in order that we may ascertain our real character. For if we are harbouring self-righteousness on the one hand, or hypocrisy on the other, we have no part in this covenant, nor any interest in its blessings. Whether we reject the covenant or dishonour it, we are equally destitute of grace, and equally obnoxious to God’s displeasure. To have a good evidence of our acceptance with God, we must trust as simply in the covenant as if *no* works were required; and be as earnest in the performance of good works, as if works *only* were required.]

Having delineated the character of the godly, let us next consider,

II. The dealings of God towards them—

It might be supposed that persons so pleasing to God should never suffer affliction: but the contrary is true, as appears, not only from the declarations of Scripture^d, but from the experience of all that have

^b Ps. cxix. 128.

^c Isai. lvi. 4, 5. Ps. ciii. 17, 18.

^d Zeph. iii. 12. Ps. xxxiv. 19.

been most favoured of God^e. But all God's dealings towards them are,

1. Mercy—

[There are no dispensations, however afflictive, which are not sent to them for good. They are all mercy in their *source*, their *measure*, their *end*. Whence do they spring, but from the love of God? for, “whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” And are they not all mercifully tempered as to their number, weight, and duration? Has there not “with every temptation been opened also a way to escape,” or “strength given according to our day^f?” And have they not all wrought for good, to wean us from the world, to purge away sin, to exercise and increase our grace, to give to us the comfort of grace bestowed, and to God the glory of it? Is there one of us who must not confess, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted?” And shall we not say that our light and momentary afflictions have been rich mercies, when we find what a weight of glory they have wrought out for us?]

2. Truth—

[Truth has respect to the performance of promises. Now afflictions are expressly promised as much as salvation itself^g. When therefore they come, we should regard them as the accomplishment of God's word, wherein he has said, that he will withhold no good thing from us. It was in this light that David viewed them, when he said, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou *in faithfulness* hast afflicted me^h. And it is in consideration of this, that we are taught to consider, not merely life with all its comforts, but even death also with all its antecedent evils, as a treasure given us by Godⁱ.]

INFER,

1. How excellent a grace is faith!

[It is faith, and faith only, that can enable us to view God's dispensations in this light. If we are weak in faith, we shall be easily drawn to fretfulness and murmuring; but if we are enabled to see the hand of God in our trials, they will all administer occasions of joy and gratitude. Faith is the philosopher's stone, that turns all to gold, and enables us to glory in that, which, to flesh and blood, is a source of sorrow and disquietude. Let us, then, cultivate this grace, and keep it in continual exercise: and, if any thing occurs, the reasons of

^e Job, David, Paul, and, above all, Christ himself.

^f Heb. xii. 6. Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^g Jer. xxx. 11.

^h Ps. cxix. 75.

ⁱ 1 Cor. iii. 22.

which we cannot immediately comprehend, let us content ourselves with saying, ‘What I know not now, I shall know hereafter.’]

2. How resigned should the believer be under all his troubles!

[Nothing can come to him which is not the fruit of God's mercy and truth. Not so much as a hair can fall from his head but by divine appointment. Believer, art thou sick and in pain? God knows that health and ease would have been prejudicial to thy soul. Hast thou sustained some heavy loss? God sees, perhaps, that the thing which thou hast lost might have been a weight about thy feet, and have retarded thee in running thy race. Art thou persecuted by the world, or tempted by Satan? It is a discipline whereby God is preparing thee for future victories, and everlasting triumphs. These may be mercies in disguise; but they are mercies notwithstanding; and therefore should be received with resignation, and improved with diligence.]

3. How lamentable is the state of unbelievers!

[While we disregard God's covenant, and his testimonies, we neither enjoy any mercy, nor have an interest in any promise. On the contrary, our very blessings are cursed to us, and every threatening in God's word is in full force against us. Moreover, our troubles are pledges and earnest of infinitely heavier calamities, that shall come upon us in the eternal world. Let us, then, if we be yet in unbelief, embrace the covenant of grace, and set ourselves diligently to keep the testimonies of our God. So shall the blessings of the covenant flow down upon us, and we shall know by happy experience, that “the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth from generation to generation.”]

DXXXIII.

PROPER METHOD OF PRAYING TO GOD.

Ps. xxv. 11. *For thy name's sake, O Lord, pardon mine iniquity! for it is great.*

GOD is a mighty Sovereign, “who doth according to his own will,” “neither giveth account to us of any of his matters.” We may indeed mark the traces of wisdom and goodness in every thing which he does; but “his ways and his thoughts are very different from ours, and far above them.” In the dispensations of his providence he pays no regard

to the moral characters of men, but “makes the sun to shine equally upon the evil and the good.” In the dispensations of his grace too he is far from preferring those whom we should think he would select. He often inclines the hearts of “publicans and harlots to enter into his kingdom,” while he leaves less abandoned Pharisees and Formalists to perish in their sins. This, if it be a humiliating truth, is also replete with comfort. If it take away all grounds of boasting, it cuts off at the same time all occasion for despondency. If he “have a right to do what he will with his own,” the vilest person in the universe may approach him with a comfortable hope of acceptance, and may address him in the language of the text.

In these words of the Psalmist we may notice,

I. His Confession—

David was not ashamed to confess that his sins were exceeding great—

[There is no reason to think that David in this psalm adverts to his transgression with Bathsheba. It is probable that the psalm was penned many years before that event. The Royal Penitent speaks rather of his in-dwelling corruptions. He had long been accustomed to observe the workings of his own heart, and had often besought God to search and try him to the uttermost^a. In this way he had marked both the defects of his duties, and the evil propensities of his nature; and, from a review of all his actions, words, and thoughts, was led to acknowledge that his sin was exceeding great. Nor was this confession peculiar to him. Holy Job, as soon as he beheld his true character, exclaimed, “Behold, I am vile^b!” And Paul no sooner became acquainted with the purity and extent of God’s law, than he saw himself a condemned sinner, and confessed, that “in him dwelt no good thing^c.”]

And does not a similar confession become *us* also?

[Let us only review our past lives, and we shall find too much occasion for the deepest humiliation. Have not many of us been addicted to open, known iniquities? And do not the consciences of such persons testify against them that their sin is great? Have not many also devoted all their time and attention to *secular* concerns? And will they account it a light thing thus to despise God, and idolize the world? Have not others satisfied themselves with a formal round of duties,

^a Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^b Job xl. 4.

^c Rom. vii. 9, 18.

in which their souls were never earnestly engaged? And can they suppose that God is pleased with a mere lip-service, when their hearts are far from him? Have not others professed godliness indeed, but walked utterly unworthy of their profession, being as proud, and passionate, as worldly too, and covetous, as those who have made no such profession? And can *they* suppose their sin is not great, when sinners are hardened, and God is blasphemed through their means? But why do we speak of the *profane* and *worldly*, or the *formal* and *hypocritical*? Must not even the *saints* themselves blush and be confounded, when they consider how miserably they have fallen short in every thing? Must they not exclaim with St. Paul, “O wretched man that I am!” Surely we must know little indeed of ourselves, if we do not all see how much the confession in the text is suited to our state.]

When, like David, we are duly humbled under a sense of our guilt, we shall readily adopt,

II. His Petition—

David could not rest without imploring forgiveness at God’s hands—

[He found a sense of guilt to be an intolerable burthen to his soul^d; and well knew that it would “eat as a canker,” till he had obtained the pardon of his sin. Hence he humbled himself before his God, and cried for mercy.]

Nor shall *we* restrain prayer before God, if we will but consider the state of an unpardoned soul—

[No words can fully express the misery of one who has all the guilt of his sins upon him. He has *no peace with God*, seeing that “God is angry with him every day,” and “the wrath of God abideth on him.” He has *no peace in his own conscience*; for though he may drown reflection for a while in business or pleasure, he is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, but casts up mire and dirt^e. He is also *destitute* of any well-founded *hope*: he may buoy up himself with blind presumption; but he will feel many misgiving fears, and forebodings of evil. He has *no comfort in his afflictions*; for, not having God for his friend, he cannot go to him with confidence, or obtain those refreshing consolations which strengthen and uphold the godly. *In a dying hour* he is yet more *wretched*: if he be not insensible as a beast, how does he regret his mis-spent hours, and wish that God would prolong his state of probation! But *in the eternal world his misery is completed*: he comes to the tribunal of justice without any mediator to reconcile him to God, or any advocate to plead his cause: yea, the very voice

^d Ps. xxxviii. 4.

^e Isai. lvii. 20.

which just before importuned him to accept of mercy, now bids him “depart accursed:” and from that moment his doom is fixed in everlasting burnings. Now can any man reflect on this, and not see the need of crying earnestly for mercy? Can our petitions be too earnest, or too constant, when they are the appointed, and the only means of escaping all this misery?]

But in our application for mercy, we must be careful to use,

III. His Plea—

The Psalmist derived all his hope of mercy from God himself—

[He pleaded not the smallness of his offences or the multitude of his services, the depth of his penitence, or the fervour of his petitions. He knew that name, which had long before been proclaimed to Moses, to which, as to “a strong tower, the righteous runneth and is safe;” and to *that* he fled for refuge; from *that* he derived his only hope, his only plea.]

Nor can we present any other plea than the name, the sacred name of Jesus—

[Under the Gospel we are taught more clearly to ask in the name of Jesus, and are assured that petitions so offered shall never fail of acceptance^f. But it is no easy matter to offer that plea in sincerity. Perhaps there is not any thing in the world more difficult. *We naturally prefer any other plea that can be devised*: and, even when we find that we have not in ourselves any worthiness on which we can rely, we are still averse to rest on the name of Jesus. We either *deem it insufficient* to procure acceptance for our prayers, or *make our unworthiness a reason for declining to urge it as our plea* with any confidence before God. But, unless we renounce every other hope, and rest entirely on the mediation and intercession of Christ, our prayer will never enter into the ears of our heavenly Father.]

OBSERVATIONS—

1. The vilest of sinners has no reason to despair—

[The confession, petition, and plea, which David presented at the throne of Grace, are suited to the very chief of sinners: nor, as the subsequent experience of David proves, can there be any state in which they shall not prevail. Let none then despond. Be it so, our iniquities are great; but are they greater than Christ’s merits, or beyond the reach of God’s mercy? If not, let us exalt our adorable Saviour, and determine, if we perish, to perish crying for mercy in the name of Jesus.]

^f John xiv. 13, 14.

2. The most eminent saints have no ground to boast—

[There never was a creature that had any righteousness of his own to plead. And if God has had mercy upon any, it was purely and entirely for his own name's sake^g. Could we ascend to heaven, and ask the glorified saints what had been the ground of their acceptance, they would all "cast down their crowns at the feet of Jesus," and shout, with one consent, "Salvation to God and to the Lamb^h!" Let the saints on earth then lie low before God, and say continually, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy *name* be the praise."]]

3. Persons of every description must guard diligently against pride and unbelief—

[Sin, of whatever kind, is both evil in itself and dangerous to us. But the consequences of pride and unbelief are peculiarly fatal. There is not any other sin which may not be forgiven, provided we seek mercy with real penitence and faith. But if we be too proud to confess our sins, and to plead the name and merits of Jesus for the forgiveness of them, we insure and seal our own condemnation. Let us then guard against *all* sins; but especially against sins which rivet all our other sins upon us. So shall we obtain favour with God, and "be to him for a name and for a praise for evermoreⁱ."]]

^g Ezek. xxxvi. 22, 32. ^h Rev. iv. 10. and vii. 10. ⁱ Jer. xiii. 11.

DXXXIV.

THE PORTION OF THOSE WHO FEAR GOD.

Ps. xxv. 12, 13. *What man is he that feareth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose: his soul shall dwell at ease.*

WHERE, as in the psalm before us, different verses begin with the different letters of the Hebrew alphabet, we must not look for a very strict connexion between the different parts; if there be somewhat of an harmonious sentiment pervading the whole, it is as much as we have reason to expect. The general idea that pervades this psalm seems to be, that if (whether under the pressure of guilt or of affliction of any kind) we betake ourselves to God in prayer, and cast our care on him, he will administer to us such consolation and support as our necessities may require. In conformity with this idea, he, throughout

the former part of the psalm, supplicates mercy for himself, and, in the words before us, declares the blessedness of all who truly fear God.

To bring the subject more fully before you, I shall,

I. Inquire after the character that is here described—

Where shall we find him? One would suppose that, in a Christian community at least, it should be difficult to find one who did not fear God: but, strange as it may appear, the character here described is by no means common. I am anxious, however, to find one; because it is to him, and to him only, that the glorious promises in my text are addressed. Assist me, then, every one of you, in this important inquiry; and descend into your own bosoms, to explore the records of conscience, and to see whether you can, in your own persons, present before me the character I am endeavouring to find. I want to know “What man amongst you feareth the Lord?”

1. Who is there amongst you that reverences God’s authority?

[There can be no question whether God’s authority should be revered: for we all acknowledge him to be the Governor of the Universe, and confess that all his creatures owe submission to his will. Indeed it is the common sentiment of all, that “he is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him:” and it is obvious, that any man who disregards his authority can have no true fear of him in his heart.]

2. Who is there amongst you that dreads his displeasure?

[We all are sinners, and, as sinners, are obnoxious to the displeasure of the Most High. Whether our lives have been more or less moral, we are all transgressors of God’s holy law, and all have merited his wrathful indignation: all, therefore, ought, with deep humility of mind, to deprecate his impending judgments. Had we never sinned, we should never have needed this kind of fear: but to fallen creatures it is absolutely and indispensably necessary. Let me then ask, Who is there amongst you that mourns over his past transgressions, and implores mercy at the hands of his offended God, and seeks reconciliation with him through the Son of his love? I do not ask, Where is the person who, on some particular

occasion, has wept for sin? but, Where is the person whose heart is habitually broken and contrite, so as to have no hope, no peace, but in the atoning blood of Christ; and who, notwithstanding God is reconciled towards him, still lothes himself for his iniquities and abominations? The man who had fled to a city of refuge ventured not out of the gates of the city any more (till the death of the High Priest), lest the pursuer of blood should fall upon him and destroy him. And if we, through fear of God's displeasure, have fled for refuge to Jesus, as to the hope set before us, we shall be careful to "abide in him," lest the sword of vengeance overtake us, and we perish.]

3. Who is there amongst you that unfeignedly and unreservedly endeavours to fulfil his will?

[A desire to please God cannot but be associated with a fear of his Divine Majesty. Say, then, where is the person who from day to day endeavours to ascertain his will, and labours to perform it? I am not inquiring after one who never errs; for such a character as that I could have no hope to find on earth; since "in many things we all offend;" and "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not." But one who labours conscientiously to approve himself to God, I may hope to find. Search amongst you, Brethren: see whether such an one be not to be found. I am not willing that the consolations in my text should be spoken in vain: I want to engage the attention of the person to whom they are addressed, and to pour them into the ear for which they are more especially designed. But do not too hastily obtrude yourselves, and say, 'I am he.' Consider once more. Are you so studious of God's will, and so determined to perform it, that no consideration of ease, or interest, or pleasure, can induce you to violate any one of his commands? And, if in any thing a more perfect way can be pointed out to you, are you ready to walk in it, notwithstanding any difficulties you may have to encounter, or any trials to which you may be exposed?]

If there be one whose conscience bears witness to him that his state before God is such as I have described, then I have found the person for whose comfort the Psalmist made the declarations in my text, and for whose benefit I shall,

II. Unfold the benefits that are accorded to him—

Stand forth, my Brother; for in the name of the Most High God I declare unto you, that,

1. You shall be taught and guided in the way that God approves—

[It may be, that at present your views of divine truth are but obscure; and that you have but little capacity to comprehend the deep things of God, and but little opportunity to investigate them. Yet I say to you, in the name of the Lord, that you shall be guided into all truth, as far as shall be necessary for the welfare of your soul; and that God's way shall be made so plain before your face, that, notwithstanding you be "a wayfaring man, and, in respect of human sciences, a fool, you shall not err therein^a." In particular, you shall have the Lord Jesus Christ revealed to you, as "the Way, the truth, and the life:" and, "having received him" into your hearts, you shall "*walk in him*, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving^b." This is the very first step to which the teaching of Almighty God will lead you; as our Lord has said: "It is written in the prophets, All thy children shall be taught of God. Every one, therefore, that hath *heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto me*^c." In the course of your pilgrimage many difficulties will arise, wherein you will need direction from above: but God engages that in all those emergencies "you shall hear a voice behind you, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it; when you would otherwise be turning to the right hand or to the left^d." As the pillar and the cloud went before the Israelites throughout all their journeyings in the wilderness for forty years, till they arrived safe in the Promised Land, so will "God guide you by his counsel, till he has safely brought you to glory^e."]

2. "Your soul shall dwell at ease"—

[It may be that your former iniquities have been great and manifold; so that, unless God interposed in a more than ordinary way to support your soul, you would sink into despair. But "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound:" and he will say to you, as to the woman of old, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." "Being justified by faith, you shall have peace with God;" and in your own conscience, even that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." It is possible, also, that you may be exposed to many trials and temptations, even such as without divine aid would utterly overwhelm you. But you shall "know in whom you have believed; and feel assured that He is able to keep that which you have committed to him^f," and that "He will preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom." Thus, as Peter, the very night before his intended execution, though bound with chains, and doomed to a cruel death, was sleeping as serenely as if no such

^a Isaï. xxxv. 8.

^b Col. ii. 6, 7.

^c John vi. 45.

^d Isaï. xxx. 21.

^e Ps. lxxiii. 24.

^f 2 Tim. i. 12.

event had awaited him, so shall "your soul dwell at ease," yea, "it shall be kept in perfect peace^g:" for, "if God giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?"^h

But, in the margin of our Bibles the sense of the original is more fully and literally expressed thus: "His soul shall *lodge in goodness*." What a rich and glorious idea is this! The Scriptures abound in expressions of this kind: Isaiah, commending the truths of the Gospel to us, says, "Eat ye that which is good, and let *your soul delight itself in fatness*:" and David says, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst my mouth praiseth thee with joyful lips." So, in my text he tells us that the Believer's soul shall "*lodge in goodness*." Yes, verily, "God himself is the habitation" of them that fear him: his bosom is the place in which they are safely lodged, far beyond the reach of harmⁱ, and fondled with more than maternal tenderness^k; insomuch that God himself "rejoices over them to do them good, and rests in his love, and joys over them with singing^l."

Thus, my Brother (for I am speaking to that particular individual who feareth God), it shall be with thee in this world: and who shall describe *thy lodging* in the world above? Oh! the joys that await thee there! how passing all expression or conception! The kingdom, the glory, the felicity of God himself shall be thine, even thy portion, and thine inheritance, for ever and ever.]

APPLICATION—

Now will I pause; and, from addressing thee who fearest God, turn,

1. To the unhappy multitude, who fear him not—

[Painful it is to make this distinction: but this distinction must be made. We are commanded to "separate the precious from the vile^m:" and if *we* forbear to do it, *God* will not: *He* will put "a difference between them that serve him and those who serve him notⁿ." It cannot but be known to you, that the generality, even of the Christian world, have not, in truth, "the fear of God before their eyes." Say, beloved, did not your own consciences attest, that, in many of you at least, the marks of holy fear did not exist, or, not in such a degree as to identify you with the character described in my text? Whilst we spoke of those who revered the authority of God, and trembled at his displeasure, and made it the one object of their lives to do his will, were not many of you constrained to say, "If this be the character of those who fear God, I am forced

^g Isai. xxvi. 3.

^h Job xxxiv. 29.

ⁱ Ps. xci. 1, 9, 10.

^k Isai. lxvi. 10—13. ^l Zeph. iii. 17.

^m Jer. xv. 19.

ⁿ Mal. iii. 18.

to confess that it does not belong to me?" Then, Brethren, by your own confession, you have no part in the promises annexed to that character. And, indeed, your own experience confirms this: for at this moment you cannot comprehend those mysteries of grace which are made clear to the believing soul. You have not that spiritual discernment, whereby alone you can understand and appreciate the things of the Spirit^o. And, as for "your soul dwelling at ease," you know nothing of it: the very thought of death and judgment is so appalling to you, that you can find no rest till you dismiss it from your mind. God himself tells us, that "you are like the troubled sea, whose waters cast up mire and dirt; and that there is no peace to the wicked^p."

Will you not, then, seek to fear God? Will you not entreat him to "put his fear into your hearts," ere it be too late? I tremble at the thought of *the lodging* prepared for you. Oh! "who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" I pray you, Brethren, realize in your minds the different states of the Rich Man and Lazarus; and "labour not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you."

2. To any one who, though really fearing God, does not yet experience the full comfort of it in his soul—

[It may be that such an one is here present, even one who, because he feels not yet all the consolations of religion, is led to doubt its existence in his soul. We read of some in the primitive Church, who were "in heaviness through manifold temptations:" and, no doubt, there may be persons so circumstanced amongst ourselves at this time. But for such God has provided peculiar encouragement. He has stated the very case, and addressed appropriate counsel to the person under it: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God^q." Do not imagine that God has forgotten his word, or that he will not fulfil it to you: for "not one jot or tittle of it shall ever fail." "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." The corn that is sown in the earth does not rise up immediately: nor must you be discouraged, if you have some time to wait before the harvest that is prepared for you appear. "The vision may tarry; but it is only for the time appointed of your God; and then it shall come, and shall not tarry^r." Only wait his leisure; and you shall find, in due season, that, "in every nation under heaven, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness shall be accepted of him."]

^o 1 Cor. ii. 12, 14. ^p Isai. lvii. 20, 21. ^q Isai. l. 10. ^r Hab. ii. 3.

DXXXV.

THE SECRETS OF THE LORD.

Ps. xxv. 14. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant.*

OF the condescension of God, mankind in general form very inadequate conceptions. His greatness is supposed to be such as not to admit of an attention to the trifling concerns of men: and because we stand at an infinite distance from him, the idea of familiar approximation to him is contemplated only as a fanatical and wild conceit. But God represents himself to us as a Father: and our blessed Lord says, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends^a." Now the Lord Jesus Christ was from eternity "in the bosom of the Father^b," and knoweth the Father as intimately and completely as the Father knoweth him^c: and all the Father's secrets he has made known to us^d: so that we are treated by him, not with the reserve that is shewn to strangers, but with the confidence that is due to persons who are bound to him in the ties of the most endeared friendship. Under the Mosaic dispensation this holy familiarity indeed was but little known. The whole economy was of a servile nature; none except the high priest having any immediate access to God; nor he, except on one day in the year; and then not without the blood of sacrifices. Yet, even under that dispensation, some were more highly favoured with divine communications; insomuch that Solomon could say, "The secret of the Lord is with the righteous^e." Under the government of the Lord Jesus Christ, the legal distinctions are removed; and all true Christians possess the same privileges as the most favoured of God's servants: so that now it may be said, in reference to them all, without exception, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant."

^a John xv. 15.

^b John i. 18.

^c John x. 15. Matt. xi. 27.

^d John xv. 15. before cited.

^e Prov. iii. 32.

In confirmation of this truth, I will endeavour to point out,

I. Some of those secrets which God reveals to his faithful people—

The whole of the divine life is a secret, from the beginning to the end; and “the joys” arising from it are such as “the stranger intermeddled not with.” But, to descend to particulars,

1. God gives them an insight into the great mystery of redemption—

[This was “a mystery hid from ages and generations,” yea, “hid in God from the foundation of the world^f,” but at last it was made known to the Church by Christ and his holy Apostles, that all God’s saints might become acquainted with it^g. St. Paul, speaking of the great truths of the Gospel, says, “It is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit^h.” We must not, however, imagine, that because this mystery is revealed to the Church in the written word, we need no further revelation of it to our souls: for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Notwithstanding, therefore, the Gospel revelation is so clear in itself, we still must “receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of Godⁱ.” A speculative knowledge of the Gospel may, indeed, be acquired by human instruction: but a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with it, as “the wisdom of God and the power of God,” can be attained only through the teaching of God’s Spirit: “flesh and blood cannot reveal it unto us:” it can be made known only by inspiration from the Father^k. And that inspiration, blessed be his name! is given to many. Through his tender mercy, it may be said of many, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things^l.” Whilst to some, who hear the Gospel, “it is spoken, as it were, only in parables;” so that, in relation to the plainest truths of the Gospel, they are ready to exclaim, as Ezekiel’s hearers did in reference to him, “Ah, Lord God! doth he not speak parables^m?” to others “it is given to know the mysteries of

^f Rom. xvi. 25. Eph. iii. 5. ^g Eph. iii. 9. Col. i. 26, 27.

^h 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10. ⁱ 1 Cor. ii. 12, 14. ^k Matt. xvi. 17.

^l 1 John ii. 20, 27. ^m Ezek. xx. 49.

the kingdom of heavenⁿ;" and by the opening of their eyes "they are brought out of darkness into marvellous light."]

2. He makes them to know their own personal interest in it—

[We are struck with the confidence with which the inspired writers speak, in reference to their own state and the state of their brethren in the faith: "Now are we the sons of God:" "we know that we have passed from death unto life:" "we know that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which he has given us:" "we know that we are of God; and the whole world lieth in wickedness^o." Now this assurance is no other than what our blessed Lord promised to his believing people: "In that day ye shall know that the Father is in me, and I in you, and you in me^p." That the believer may, by fair and rational deduction, ascertain much of his state before God, there can be no doubt: but that internal manifestations are, in many cases, vouchsafed to the soul, is also certain: for our Lord has promised, that "he will manifest himself unto us, as he does not unto the world:" and this promise he has explained, by saying, that "he and his Father will love us, and come unto us, and make their abode with us^q." Accordingly we find, that to many is given "the Holy Spirit," *as a witness*, to "bear witness with their spirit that they are the children of God," and, as "*a Spirit of adoption*, enabling them, with holy confidence, to cry, Abba, Father^r." They have prayed to him, like the Psalmist, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation^s:" and God has answered them in the desire of their hearts, and enabled them to say, in reference to him, "O God, thou art my God^t;" and, in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his^u."]

3. He shews them that every occurrence, of whatever kind, is in some way or other working for the ultimate salvation of their souls—

[They may not always see this at first: but, when more fully instructed, they learn to trust in God, assured, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne." See a remarkable instance of this in the Apostle Paul. He was shut up for two full years in prison, and was thus deprived of exercising his apostolic office in his accustomed way. Such an event as this would be contemplated, by the Church at large, as a subject of unmixed sorrow: but St. Paul himself had far different

ⁿ Mark iv. 11.

^o 1 John iii. 2, 14, 24. and v. 19.

^p John xiv. 20.

^q John xiv. 21—23.

^r Rom. viii. 15, 16.

^s Ps. xxxv. 3.

^t Ps. lxiii. 1.

^u Cant. ii. 16.

views of it: he said, "I know that this shall turn to my salvation:" nor was he less confident that good would accrue from it, also, to the Church of God: yea, he saw, even whilst in bonds, the beneficial results of his imprisonment; and declared, that, instead of obstructing the progress of the Gospel, it had "tended rather to the furtherance of the Gospel," since many had been emboldened by it to preach the word with greater courage and fidelity^x. Thus does God compose the minds of all his faithful people. They may indeed, for a season, be ready to complain with Jacob, "All these things are against me;" but he whispers in their ears, that "All things are working together for their good^y;" and that, eventually, they shall have as much reason to bless him for the darkest dispensations as for those which were more gratifying to flesh and blood.]

Passing by many other secrets, I will proceed to set before you,

II. That more particular view of his covenant which is the crown and summit of them all—

From all eternity did God enter into covenant with his Son; as it is said, "The counsel of peace was between them both^z." And to this covenant God leads the minds of his people,

1. As the source of all their blessings—

[Certain it is, that, whatever grace has been bestowed upon us, it has been conferred, "not on account of any works of righteousness which we have done, but according to God's purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began^a." But this is a great secret; a secret utterly unknown to the world at large: and one which not all, even of righteous persons, are able to receive. There is, in the minds of many, a prejudice against it, as though such an idea would necessarily puff up the mind with pride and conceit: whereas, there is nothing in the world that so much tends to humble and abase the soul as this: for it takes from man all ground of self-preference, and leads him to give all the honour of his salvation to God alone. Believer, how wonderful is the thought, that God, from all eternity, set his heart on thee; ordained thee to be born in a country where the light of Revelation shone, and where the means and opportunities of conversion should be afforded thee! How wonderful, too, that this grace, which so many receive in vain, should be made effectual for

^x Phil. i. 12—14, 19.

^y Rom. viii. 28.

^z Zech. vi. 13.

^a 2 Tim. i. 9.

thee; and that, by the operation of God's mighty power on thy soul, thou shouldst be "turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God!" Art thou not amazed, that *thou* shouldst be "taken, when so many are left;" and that the Saviour, who to so many millions is only "a stumbling-block and rock of offence, should be to thee a sanctuary," where thou hast found rest to thy soul? Truly, it is a great matter if God has taught thee, that "thou hast not chosen him, but he thee^b;" that thou hast not loved him, or apprehended him, but hast been loved and apprehended by him^c; that "He hath loved thee with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn thee^d!" Does not the thought of this overwhelm thy soul with gratitude? and art thou not altogether lost in wonder, love, and praise?]

2. As the security for the everlasting continuance of them—

[This is another part of the same stupendous mystery: and blessed, indeed, are the ears that have heard this secret from the Lord, and the eyes that can discern the truth of it! Believer, when God entered into covenant with his Son, he left it not uncertain whether any benefit should accrue from his mediation, but engaged, that "when he should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hand." Then he gave thee to his Son, that in thee "he might see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." Thou wast then ordained to be a jewel in his crown: and the Father engaged, when he put thee into the hands of his Son, that "none should ever pluck thee from them^e." Times without number does the Lord Jesus speak of his people in this light, as "given him from eternity by the Father^f:" and "of those who were so given him, he will lose none^g." What a consolation is this to thee, under all thy difficulties and all thy conflicts, to know that "God hath made with thee an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure^h!" God himself tells us, that "he confirmed his covenant with an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before usⁱ." Rejoice, then, in this thought. Bless God for making it known to thee. See how safe thou art in the hands of an unchanging God. See to what it is owing that thou hast not been consumed already^k; and what is thy security, against all the wiles

^b John xv. 16. ^c 1 John iv. 10. Gal. iv. 9. Phil. iii. 12.

^d Jer. xxxi. 3. ^e John x. 28, 29.

^f John xvii. 2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24.

^g John xvii. 12.

^h 2 Sam. xxiii. 5.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 17, 18.

^k Mal. iii. 6.

of Satan, and all the infirmities of flesh and blood. "Know, then, in whom thou hast believed; and that, as he is able to keep that which thou hast committed to him¹," so "he will preserve thee unto his heavenly kingdom^m."]

To IMPROVE this subject, I would further say,

1. Cultivate increasing friendship with God—

[It is not to all, but to his friends only, that God imparts these heart-reviving secrets, even to them who truly "fear him." Nor is it amidst the noise and bustle of the world that he will communicate them, but in seasons of retirement, and in the stillness of the night. It is by a still small voice that he imparts them to the soul. O let your fellowship with him be sweet and frequent! Go to him on all occasions: consult him in every emergency: listen to his voice, whether he speak by the written word, or by his Holy Spirit. Say to him at all times, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." So "will he draw nigh to you, when you draw nigh to him:" and when you spread before him your inmost wants, "he will guide you by his counsel:" he will "lead you into all truth;" he will make known to you "the deep things of Godⁿ;" and by communications of every kind will "perfect that which concerneth you^o;" enabling you to "comprehend, in a measure, what none can fully comprehend, the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ, and thereby filling you with all the fulness of God^p."]

2. Make a due improvement of the secrets he has already imparted to you—

[Treasure them up in your minds, for your support and comfort under all the trials of life. They will prove a healing balm to every wound; and, like an anchor of the soul, they will keep you steadfast amidst all the storms that you may encounter in this tempestuous world^q.

But, keep them not altogether in your own bosoms. God may make use of you for the imparting of them to others, and for the sustaining and strengthening of your weaker brethren. Yet, care is necessary, that you do not, by an indiscreet disclosure of them to those whose minds are not prepared to receive them, lay a stumbling-block before the very persons whom you wish to edify. Our Lord cautions us "not to cast our pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend us^r." We must administer "milk to babes, and strong meat to those only who are able

¹ 2 Tim. i. 12.

^m 2 Tim. iv. 18.

ⁿ 1 Cor. ii. 10.

^o Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^p Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^q Heb. vi. 19.

^r Matt. vii. 6.

to digest it^s." But to those who have ears to hear, it is well to speak of these things, as our Lord and his Apostles conversed of them in the way to Emmaus. Then will your hearts often burn within you; and your own souls, as well as those of your Brethren, be edified in faith and love.]

^s 1 Cor. iii. 1, 2. Heb. v. 12—14.

DXXXVI.

THE WORSHIP OF GOD DELIGHTFUL.

Ps. xxvi. 8. *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

BETWEEN the people of God and the men of this world there is a much broader line of distinction than is generally imagined. In the performance of outward duties there may be but little difference: but in their motives and principles they are as far asunder as heaven and earth, yea, I had almost said, as heaven and hell. They have altogether a different *taste*; the one affecting heavenly things as their most delightful occupation; whilst the other follow them rather by constraint, and feel themselves most in their element when they are engaged in worldly company and in carnal pursuits. The faithful servant of God enjoys the testimony of his own conscience, that he has no real delight in any thing but in doing God's will, and in enjoying his presence. David, in this respect, may serve as a glass, wherein every real saint may discern his own image. He could appeal to God that he had found no pleasure in worldly company and worldly pursuits; but that his delight had been altogether in communion with his God, and in the ordinances of his grace^a.

In order to make a suitable improvement of the assertion before us, I will shew,

I. The reasons which he had for so loving the house of God—

To give a full account of them would be impossible. It may suffice to specify a few of those which operated with greater force upon his mind.

^a ver. 2—5.

1. It was the immediate residence of the Deity—

["I have loved," says he, "the habitation of thy house, and *the place where thine honour dwelleth*." When Moses made the tabernacle, it pleased God to come down and honour it with his more immediate presence, and to manifest there his glory in the sight of all Israel^b. There God promised, in a more especial manner, to meet his people; saying, "Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee: and there will I meet with thee; and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, and from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel^c." The same blessed privilege was given to all Israel, through the medium of their High Priest, as long as the tabernacle and the temple stood: and on numberless occasions had David reaped the benefit of this condescending and merciful appointment. Can we wonder, then, that he should love the house of God, where he enjoyed so vast a privilege, and where such transcendent benefits were accorded to him? But we know from himself what his feelings were in relation to it: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple^d."]]

2. There he was enabled to worship God in the way that God himself had appointed—

[Though God might be worshipped acceptably in every place, yet it was at the tabernacle only that any sacrifice could be offered to him, or that a full access to him could be enjoyed. There alone could a sinner be sprinkled with the blood of his offering, and have the pardon of his sins thus sealed upon his soul. Hence, when David was driven from Jerusalem, and forced to take refuge in a heathen land, this was the great subject of his complaint; not, that he was separated from his friends, but that he was cut off from communion with his God in the established ordinances of his worship. Hear his sad complaint: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God! My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night; while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day As with a sword in my bones, mine

^b Exod. xl. 34—38. ^c Exod. xxv. 21, 22. ^d Ps. xxvii. 4.

enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God?^e”]

3. There he obtained those supplies of grace and peace which his daily necessities required—

[The whole book of Psalms is little else than a record of answers to his prayers. “I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings: and he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” True, he might enjoy much of this in his own secret chamber; but it was chiefly in the house of God that he obtained these benefits. This he himself acknowledges: and he assigns it as the reason for his ardent attachment to that holy place: “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee A day in thy courts is better than a thousand: I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the Lord is a sun and a shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly^g.”]

The example before us might be amply sufficient to commend to our regard the house of God. But I must proceed to state,

II. The incomparably stronger reasons which we have for a similar attachment to it—

The dispensation which we are privileged to enjoy is of a more liberal kind than that under which he lived.

1. Our access to God is more intimate—

[David, though a prophet and a king, did not dare to enter into the most holy place, where God displayed his glory. Had he presumed to intrude himself there, he would have been struck dead upon the spot. Not even the high-priest could enter there but on one day in the year, and in the manner prescribed by God himself. But *we* are permitted to come even to his very throne, and to behold him on his mercy-

^e Ps. xli. 1—4, 10.

^f Ps. xl. 1—3.

^g Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4, 10, 11.

seat. Yes, the vail of the temple, at the time of our Saviour's death, was rent in twain from the top to the bottom: and from that very moment a way of access to him has been open for all the sinners of mankind, without exception. This is the construction put on that event by an inspired Apostle, who says, "Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the vail, that is to say, his flesh, and having an High-Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith^h." "The Holy Ghost himself," I say, has taught us thisⁱ. And is this no ground for love to divine ordinances? Methinks, the liberty thus accorded to us should produce in us a correspondent liberty of mind in approaching God, and an exquisite delight in drawing nigh unto him.]

2. Our views of him are more clear—

[Even the high-priest himself, when admitted into the sanctuary, could behold nothing but a bright cloud abiding on the ark between the cherubims. But we have access to the true tabernacle, the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily^k." "He is the image of the invisible God^l," "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person^m;" and "in beholding him, we behold the Father himselfⁿ:" yea, "as with an unveiled face we behold the glory" both of the Father and the Son^o. We see "God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself^p," and are enabled to call him our Father and our Friend^q.

Of the perfections of God, also, we have incomparably clearer views than ever were vouchsafed even to David himself. True indeed, he says, that, in God, "Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other^r." But he had not such an insight into that mystery as we enjoy. The full discovery of God, as "a just God, and yet a justifier of ungodly men^s," was reserved for us, under the Gospel dispensation: we see, not only mercy, but faithfulness and justice, engaged on our side, and pledged for the forgiveness of our sins^t.

His purposes, too, how marvellously are they unravelled, and with what distinctness are they exhibited to our admiring eyes! Things which no eye ever saw, or ear heard, or heart conceived, under the Jewish economy, are revealed unto us by the Spirit; so that, from eternity to eternity, we can behold the designs of God unfolded, first, as they were originally concerted between

^h Heb. x. 19—22.

^l Col. i. 15.

^o 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^r Ps. lxxxv. 10.

ⁱ Heb. ix. 7, 8.

^m Heb. i. 3.

^p 2 Cor. v. 19.

^s Rom. iii. 26.

^k Col. ii. 19.

ⁿ John xiv. 9.

^q Gal. iv. 6.

^t 1 John i. 9.

the Father and the Son; then as executed by Christ Jesus in his incarnate and glorified state; and, lastly, as they will be consummated at the day of judgment. Say, then, whether we should not delight in drawing nigh to God, and having our souls filled with these heavenly contemplations? If the shadow of these things so endeared to David the house of God, what should the substance of them effect in our hearts?]

3. Our communications from him are more abundant—

[Doubtless David was most highly favoured of the Lord; and “God was very abundant towards him, both in faith and love.” But still we cannot yield to him, no, not even to him, in the privileges we enjoy. The Holy Spirit was not then “poured out so abundantly” as he has since been upon the servants of the Lord^x. To us he is given as “a Spirit of adoption^y,” and as “a witness” to testify of that adoption^z; and as “a seal,” to mark us for the Lord’s peculiar treasure^a. The servile spirit of the Law is altogether banished from us, and we are “made free *indeed*^b.” With what exalted views are we sometimes favoured, when we can see the Lord Jesus Christ actually bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and pleading our cause at the right hand of God, and ordering every thing, both in heaven and earth, for our welfare, and preparing for us a mansion in heaven, himself taking possession of it for us as our forerunner, and shortly about to come again in his own person to invest us with all the glory he has purchased for us, even a participation of his own throne, his own kingdom, and his own glory! What is all this, but “an earnest” of heaven itself already begun in the soul? Yet all this is vouchsafed to us frequently under the ministry of the word, and at the table of the Lord; insomuch that we seem caught up, as it were, into the third heavens, and scarcely know whether we are in the body or out the body, by reason of the brightness of our views, and the blessedness of our souls. I mean not to say that this is the *experience* of all, nor of any at all times: but I do say, that it is the *privilege* of all; and that it is our own fault if we do not actually possess it: and that the hope of gratifying our taste with these rich dainties cannot fail of endearing to us the house where this feast is provided for us^c.]

It will now, in conclusion, be profitable to INQUIRE,

1. Whence it is that this experience is so rare—

[It must be confessed that there are but few who thus delight in the ordinances of God. But why is this? Would

^u 1 Tim. i. 14. ^x John vii. 39. Tit. iii. 6. ^y Rom. viii. 15.

^z Rom. viii. 16. ^a Eph. i. 13, 14.

^b John viii. 36.

^c Isai. xxv. 6—8.

they not be alike precious to all, if all desired to make a suitable improvement of them? The truth is, that the generality of persons attend them only as a mere form, without any consciousness of the ends for which they have been appointed. What if we viewed them as our mother's breast, to which we were invited for the support and nourishment of our souls? What if we came to them, "desiring the sincere and unadulterated milk of the word, that we might grow thereby^d?" Verily we should then find such communications from the Lord Jesus, as would fill us with unutterable joy^e. But we feel not our need of mercy: we have no real desire after the Saviour: we are content with a "godliness which consists in mere form, without any thing of power." No wonder, then, that the house of God has no charms for us. True, indeed, persons may affect divine ordinances, just as they would a fine concert, on account of the eloquence of the person by whom they are administered^f; or they may set a value on them as means of fostering a high conceit of their own goodness^g: but as means of access to God, and as a medium of communion with him, they find no real delight in them. To enter into the experience of David, and obtain a conformity of mind to his, religion must be our one great and paramount concern. If once Christ become our supreme joy, whatever brings us near to him, and him near to us, will be "as marrow and fatness to our souls."]

2. What are the prospects of those in whom this experience is found—

[Truly, they are blessed among men. They need not envy any other people upon earth. They possess what is far superior to all the delights of sense. View a man at the footstool of the Most High: view even the poor publican, who, through a consciousness of his own extreme unworthiness, dared not so much as to lift up his eyes to heaven. Who that knows with what complacency Almighty God beheld him, and with what pleasure he listened to his sighs, and treasured up his tears in his vial, would not congratulate him on the state of his soul, and on the prospects that were before him? The truth is, that every such person has "his sins put away from him, as far as the east is from the west;" and "his name is written in the Lamb's book of life." For every such person is prepared "a crown of glory, that fadeth not away." He now beholds his God by faith: and soon shall he behold him face to face. He now draws nigh to God in a temple made with hands: and he shall soon commune with him in his temple

^d 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^e John iv. 10. and vii. 37, 38.

^f Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^g Isai. lviii. 2.

above. He now pours forth his prayers and praises at such intervals as the infirmity of his nature will admit of; and he soon shall engage in praising God, without infirmity or interruption, to all eternity.]

DXXXVII.

DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD'S ORDINANCES.

Ps. xxvii. 4. *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.*

MOST of the saints recorded in the Holy Scriptures were eminent for some particular grace. In Abraham, faith was chiefly conspicuous; in Job, patience; in Moses, meekness; in Elijah, faithfulness and intrepidity. In respect of devotion, David seems to have surpassed all others. Of none have we such ample and minute accounts, in relation to this matter, as we have of him. His public addresses to the Deity, his private communion with him, the inmost recesses of his heart when in his closet or upon his bed, are all laid open to us. On this account the Psalms are pre-eminently useful to all who wish to cultivate a devout spirit, and to maintain a close walk with God. The expression before us may serve as a specimen of the whole. In discoursing upon it, I will,

I. Set before you the example of David—

The one object of his desire was to enjoy the ordinances of his God—

[David was not of the tribe to which the priesthood exclusively belonged: yet would he gladly have possessed the privilege of the priests, in having his stated residence as near as possible to the tabernacle of his God. But though this could not be, he determined, by the constancy of his attendance there, to make it, as it were, his residence and habitation. This indeed was “the one object of his desire:” and in comparison of it there was nothing in the world that he wished for. To this he made every thing subservient: even the affairs of state were not suffered so to occupy his mind as to divert his attention from the service of the sanctuary. This one object he sought, and “determined to seek it” “to the latest hour of

his life." He "sought it of the Lord" too, entreating him so to order and overrule every thing, that he might not be forced away from Jerusalem, or, whilst there, be kept away from the ordinances of his God. If at any time he was, by the efforts of his enemies, prevented from waiting upon God, he mourned over it, and "panted after the return of those blessed seasons, even as the hunted deer panteth after the water-brooks^a." On some occasions, his enemies, knowing how painful to him his absence from the tabernacle was, exulted over him, and said, "Where is now thy God?" And so distressing to him were these impious taunts, that "tears were his meat night and day on account of them^b," and they were even "as a sword in his bones^c." At those seasons he envied the swallows, that were able to build their nests in the courts of God's house: he envied them, I say, their proximity to the altar of his God^d. Every day that was spent at a distance from that, seemed, as it were, to be lost to his life; so entirely was his soul wrapped up in the enjoyment of divine ordinances, and in cultivating communion with his God.]

And this desire was founded on the benefit he had derived from them—

[There "he beheld the beauty of the Lord;" and there "he inquired of the Lord," spreading before him, from day to day, his every want, his every wish. He looked through the various sacrifices that were offered there from day to day, and beheld in them the perfections of his God. In the death of all the victims he saw the desert of sin, and *the justice* of God, which had denounced death as the punishment of sin. In the acceptance of those sacrifices he saw *the goodness and mercy* of God, who had appointed such offerings as means of leading the people to that Great Sacrifice, which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world. In the sprinklings and ablutions that were practised, he beheld *the holiness* of God, who would accept no sinner who should not be purged from his iniquities, and be made holy after the divine image. In the whole of the services altogether he saw "mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace kissing each other^e."

Here he felt encouragement to pour out his soul before God, and to ask whatsoever his returning necessities might require. This, to him whose trials were so great and manifold, was an unspeakable privilege. The extreme arduousness of his affairs also rendered it most desirable to him to spread all his difficulties before the Lord, and to ask counsel of him for his direction.

^a Ps. xlii. 1, 2.^b Ps. xlii. 3.^c Ps. xlii. 10.^d Ps. lxxxiv. 1—4.^e Ps. lxxxv. 10.

True it was that in private he could carry his affairs to the Lord, and implore help from him: but, as the public ordinances were of God's special appointment, and as the high-priest was the established medium of access to him, and of communications from him, he delighted more particularly to wait upon God there; that so, whilst he received blessings in a more abundant measure from God, he might glorify God in the sight of all Israel.]

Admiring, as I do, this bright example, I beg leave to,

II. Commend it to your imitation—

We have far greater reason to love the house of God than ever David had—

[If the beauty of the Lord was visible in the Jewish worship, how much more so must it be in the ordinances of the Gospel! David beheld the perfections of his God only under types and shadows: but we behold them reflected as in a glass or mirror, with transcendent brightness, and all shining with united splendour in the face of Jesus Christ. We see, not bulls and goats, but the very Son of God himself, “Jehovah’s fellow,” offered in sacrifice for the sins of men. What then must *the justice* be that required SUCH a sacrifice! What *the love*, that gave HIM from the Father’s bosom to be a sacrifice! What *the mercy*, that spared not HIM, in order that WE, enemies and rebels, might be spared! So imperfectly was this mystery known under the Jewish dispensation, that all, even the most exalted prophets, were in a state of comparative darkness: but now, “the things which from the beginning of the world eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor had it entered into the heart of man to conceive, are revealed unto us by the Spirit^f,” so that we can truly and emphatically say, “The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth^g.” John the Baptist was greater in this respect than all the prophets; because he personally saw and bare witness to Him, whom all the other prophets spoke of obscurely, and at the distance of many hundred years: but, great as John was, “the least and lowest in the Gospel kingdom is greater than he^h.” In our ordinances, Jesus Christ is so fully revealed, that he may be said to be “evidently set forth crucified before our eyesⁱ,” and at his holy table we “eat his flesh, and drink his blood,” as truly in a spiritual sense, as we do really and substantially eat the bread and drink the wine by which they are represented. We see that through the virtue of this sacrifice God is so reconciled to us, as to “behold

^f 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

^h Matt. xi. 11.

^g 1 John ii. 8.

ⁱ Gal. iii. 1.

no iniquity in us^k:" for, viewing us as clothed in the righteousness of his dear Son, he beholds us "without spot or blemish^l." Moreover as by faith we *see* the Lord Jesus carrying his own blood within the veil, so we also *hear* him making intercession for us at the right hand of God: yea, and "out of the fulness that is treasured up in him we receive" all the blessings that he has purchased for us. How often are we, in the experience of these things, constrained to cry out with the prophet, "How great is his goodness! how great is his beauty^m!" And how often, in rapturous admiration of him, do we pray with the Psalmist, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!" In truth, it is by thus "beholding as with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lordⁿ."

Nor have we less the advantage of David in relation to the things which we would ask of God: for we are able to inquire more explicitly and distinctly of our God than he could. He indeed might say with Moses, "Lord, shew me thy glory:" and God would, as in the case of Moses, "make all his goodness to pass before him^o." But audible sounds conveyed nothing to them in comparison of what shall be disclosed to us by the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit, speaking in us through the written word. To us all the blessings of the Covenant are laid open: and, as God, when he revealed them, said, "I will be inquired of concerning these things to do them^p," we are at liberty to take that covenant, and spread it before the Lord, and to ask of him every distinct blessing that is contained in it. We may lay hold on every promise that we can find in the Inspired Volume, and plead it with God, and have it fulfilled to our souls — — — Besides, *we can ask in the name of Jesus Christ*; which none of the prophets ever could. And with what confidence can we do that, when we reflect on the relation which subsists between the Father and the Son, and the express engagement which the Father has made to answer every petition which is offered in his Son's name^q! — — — Moreover, the particular promise of the Lord Jesus to be more immediately with his people in the public ordinances, and to grant whatever any number of his congregated people shall agree to ask^r, is a still further encouragement to us to frequent the house of God: for experience proves, that still, as formerly, "God loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob^s."]

^k Numb. xxiii. 21.

^l Eph. v. 27.

^m Zech. ix. 17.

ⁿ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^o Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

^p Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^q John xvi. 23, 24. ^r Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

^s Ps. lxxxvii. 2.

We should therefore desire it no less than David did—

[We should make a point of attending on all stated occasions the ordinances of our God. We should not suffer any trifling matter to detain us from them: and, if we are kept from them by any means, it should fill us with grief rather than complacency: and we should determine as soon as possible to remove the obstacle that deprives us of so great a blessing.

More particularly, we should keep in mind what it is that we should go thither to obtain; nor ever consider the true object of the ordinances as attained, unless we be enriched with brighter views of his beauty, and more enlarged discoveries of his excellency — — — We should consider too, what our more immediate necessities require; so that we may be ready to spread them all before him, and to inquire of him respecting them — — — Then the more enlarged our expectations of benefit from the ordinances are, the more abundant will be God's communications of blessings to us by them. If we "open our mouths ever so wide, he will fill them^t."]]

To this I would URGE you, from the consideration, that such love to God's ordinances is,

1. Most conducive to your present happiness—

[Hear the testimony of David himself: "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: he shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple^u." And with this agrees the experience of every living saint. Hence every true Believer can say, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and *the place where thine honour dwelleth^x*:" or rather, the more appropriate language of his heart is, "O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary^y." I will leave you to judge, whether a person, with such desires, and such enjoyments, be not happy. And if you are persuaded that he must be so, then seek your own happiness in this way, in which you cannot possibly be disappointed: for "he never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain."]

2. The best preparative for heaven—

[Heaven is a place of continued occupation; of exercises, for which we are now to be trained. We must now obtain a taste for heavenly employments; and *in that taste real piety*

^t Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^x Ps. xxvi. 8.

^u Ps. lxxv. 4.

^y Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2.

consists. We quite mistake if we imagine that religion consists in *notions* or in *forms*: it is a *taste*; a taste not formed by nature or education; but wrought in us by the Spirit of God: and the acquisition of this constitutes our meetness for heaven. What happiness could a soul that feels the exercises of devotion irksome, find in heaven; where the singing praises to God and to the Lamb forms the one employment of all around the throne, and will to all eternity? If this be not the pleasure which you chiefly affect in this world, be assured that you are not prepared to unite with saints and angels in the world to come. If this be not your state, whatever knowledge you may possess, you are yet carnal: for God himself has said, that “they who are after the flesh do *mind* (*savour*) the things of the flesh; and they who are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit^z.” I pray you then to seek your happiness in God; and never to rest, till you can say, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee^a.”]

^z Rom. viii. 5. *φρονοῦσιν.*

^a If this be a subject at *the Opening of a Church or Chapel*, the great need that there was of a place of worship may be stated, and a hope expressed, that it may be the means of preparing many for the Church above.

DXXXVIII.

THE DUTY OF PRAYER.

Ps xxvii. 8. *When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.*

PERHAPS there are few things which more strongly characterize a child of God, than a spirit of prayer. The Lord's faithful servants are particularly designated as “a people near unto him^a :” whilst of the hypocrite it is pointedly asked, “Will he always call upon God? Will he delight himself in the Almighty^b?” The invitations of God are common to all: but the way in which they are received constitutes the difference between the child of this world and the child of God.

The words before us, whilst they describe the experience of David, will lead me to shew,

I. In what light the invitations of God are, for the most part, regarded—

God is incessantly calling men to seek his face—

^a Ps. cxlviii. 14.

^b Job xxvii. 10.

[He does this by *his word*; in which he bids us to look to him, and call upon him, and turn to him, and lay hold upon him; and sends his ministers to invite and beseech us in his name. He does it, also, by *his providence*: all that he does for us in a way of mercy, is to stimulate us to love him; and his chastisements are to awaken us to our duty, saying, "Hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it." He does it, also, by *his Spirit*; for conscience is his voice within us, "his still small voice," whereby he whispers to us, and moves us, and "strives with us," and "draws us to himself." The whole creation, the heavenly bodies moving in their orbits, "the elements that fulfil his will," the "birds which know their season," and the beasts which acknowledge their Benefactor; the occurrences of every day, even the most common and casual, as the going to a well for water^c, or climbing up into a tree for the gratifying of curiosity^d; all subserve the same blessed end, to introduce us to the knowledge of his love, and to the enjoyment of his favour.]

But his invitations are almost universally "made light of"—

[Some treat them *with contempt*, "mocking his messengers, and despising his words^e" — — — Others justify their refusal of them by a variety of excuses, like those in the parable, who "had bought a field, and must go and see it; and a yoke of oxen, which they must go to try; or had married a wife, and therefore could not come." Every one has his plea: one is too old to change his ways; another too young to engage in such serious concerns; and another too much occupied to be at liberty for such pursuits. Others profess a willingness to obey the call, but never realize their intentions. They say, "I go, Sir; but they never execute their Father's will^f:" they will, like Ezekiel's auditors, approve what they hear, but will never give themselves truly and unreservedly to God^g.]

Let us now proceed to shew, on the contrary,

II. The light in which they ought to be regarded—

David's example is precisely that which we should follow. There was in his bosom a chord in perfect unison with that which the finger of God had touched, and that vibrated to the touch. Thus, when God says to all the sinners of mankind, "Seek ye my face," there should be in every one of us a responding chord,

^c John iv. 7, 10.

^d Luke xix. 4, 5.

^e 2 Chron. xxxvi. 16.

^f Matt. xxi. 30.

^g Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

in perfect harmony with the divine command: and we should, every one of us, reply, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." This duty we should execute,

1. With a grateful sense of his condescension and grace—

[How amazing is it that such a proposal should originate with God; and that Jehovah should "stand at the door of our hearts, and knock" there for admittance! If a permission only had been granted to us to seek his favour, methinks it should have been embraced with all imaginable earnestness: for sure enough, if such an invitation were sent to those who are now in hell, it would not be treated with indifference *there*. But it is not a mere permission that we receive; it is a call, an invitation, an entreaty: and should we "make light of *that*?" No: we should turn unto our God with our whole hearts, and avail ourselves, without delay, of the opportunity that is thus afforded us.]

2. With a ready acquiescence in his appointed way—

[God tells us, that it is in Christ alone that he can accept us; and that we must come to him through Christ, pleading the merit of his blood, and relying altogether on his atoning sacrifice. And shall this appear to us a hard saying? Shall this be deemed too humiliating for our proud hearts to submit to? Shall we not bless God, that he has given us a Saviour, who shall mediate between him and us, and, like "a days-man^h," lay his hand on both, in order to our reconciliation? Surely we should not hesitate a moment to humble ourselves before him, to acknowledge our desert of his wrathful indignation, and to implore his mercy in the name of his dear Son.]

3. With a determination of heart, that nothing shall ever keep us from him—

[Things there are, without number, which would keep us in bondage, and detain us from our God. But we should be on our guard against them all; and determine to break through every obstacle that the world, the flesh, and the devil, can place in our way. For, what can the *world* do, either by its allurements or its terrors, to counterbalance the loss of the divine favour? As for the *flesh*, neither its weakness nor its corruptions should discourage us in our way to God. Nor should the *devil*, with all his wiles and all his devices, be suffered to divert us from our purpose, or to retard us in our way. We should have our hearts bent upon executing the commands of God. Every object under heaven should be

^h Job ix. 33.

subordinated to that. Other duties, doubtless, should be performed in their place: but to obtain God's favour should be our first concern; and life itself, in comparison of that, should be of no value in our eyes.]

ADDRESS—

[God calls you now, my Brethren, by my voice; and says to every one of you, "Seek ye my face." O that ye knew the day of your visitation! O that ye now viewed this mercy as ye will most unquestionably view it ere long! For, whether ye be in heaven or in hell, be assured that the divine favour will appear to you no light concern. I would that now the Psalmist's determination were adopted by every one of you. Tell me, I pray you, whether the resolution be not wise: tell me whether it be not necessary: tell me whether, if ye continue to decline God's invitation till the door of heaven is finally closed against you, you will not curse your folly with an anguish that will exceed your utmost conceptions, and bewail to all eternity the conduct you now pursue. I say, then, to every one of you, "Seek ye after God: seek him instantly, without delay: seek him whilst he may be found, and call upon him whilst he is near:" for the time is quickly coming when your day of grace shall be closed, and "God will swear in his wrath that ye shall never enter into his rest." On the other hand, assure yourselves, that, "if you seek him, he will be found of you," and "your hearts shall live for ever." Let every one of you, therefore, now go home, and put the matter to a trial. See whether God will not be gracious unto you: see whether he will not answer your prayers, and fulfil your desires, and "do exceeding abundantly for you above all that ye can ask or think. I speak with confidence; for, from the beginning of the world to this hour. "He never said to any, Seek ye my face in vain!"]

DXXXIX.

ADORING GOD FOR HIS MERCIES.

Ps. xxviii. 7. *The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.*

THE man of this world delights to speak of the things of this world: the man of God delights to speak of God: each speaketh out of the abundance of his own heart. It is the very character of a true believer, that "he regards the works of the Lord and the operation of his hands," and that he desires to magnify the Lord for all the benefits conferred

upon him. No one can read the Psalms of David, without being penetrated with this thought. What the particular affliction was from which he had recently been delivered when he penned this psalm, we do not certainly know : but after blessing God for his condescension and grace in hearing and answering his supplications, he records, for the benefit of all future saints, his feelings in the review of the mercies vouchsafed unto him.

In this record we see,

I. What God is to the believer—

To all that trust in him, he is both a protector from all evil, and a helper to all good—

This is a blessed truth, if considered only *in theory*—

[What cannot he do, that “has the God of Jacob for his help?” To what duty may he not address himself with a full assurance that he shall be able to fulfil it? Would he overcome the most inveterate lusts? “Through the influence of God’s Spirit he shall mortify the deeds of the body,” and “bring the very thoughts of his heart into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” Would he attain and exercise all the graces of the Spirit? he shall do so, yea, “he shall do all things through Christ strengthening him”— — —

And whom needs he to fear? Surely neither men nor devils : for, what can man do, when he himself is crushed before the worm? As for Satan, though he have at his command all the principalities and powers of hell, he is a vanquished enemy, and shall ere long “be bruised for ever under the believer’s feet”— — —]

But this truth is yet more blessed, when it is *practically experienced* by the believer in his own soul—

[What a zest does the believer’s own experience give to every declaration of the Inspired Volume! When, from the communications he has actually received, he can say, God is *my* strength and *my* shield, then it is that he is prepared to enjoy these blessed truths as he ought, and to give unto God the glory due unto his name. And here we cannot but exhort every believer to trust in God with his whole heart. In this case he shall never be disappointed of his hope : yea rather, the more he expects, the more he shall receive ; and according to his faith it shall be done unto him. Let him only be able to say with David, “My heart trusteth in him;” and he shall sooner or later have reason to add, “I *am* helped :” I *am* protected from evils, which I could not by my own wisdom or

power avoid; and I *am* enabled to do things, for which my own strength would have been utterly insufficient: by my own experience therefore, no less than from the divine testimony, I can say, "The Lord is *my* strength, and *my* shield."]

As from David's assertions we learn what God is to us, so from his frame of mind we may see,

II. What should be the disposition of our hearts towards him—

Certainly these exalted privileges should be received by us,

1. With joy—

[Who can have reason to rejoice in comparison of the believer? Look round and see how the world at large are taken in the snare of the devil, and led captive by him at his will. Have you no reason to rejoice when God has interposed with a mighty hand and a stretched-out arm to deliver you? When you see the dangers with which you are surrounded, have you no reason to rejoice in having such a shield as is sufficiently large to encompass you on every side, and so strong as to be impenetrable to all the fiery darts of the devil? When you see what lusts you have to mortify, and what duties to perform, have you not reason to rejoice in having Omnipotence for your strength? O rejoice; rejoice in the Lord always; yea, "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory!" However "greatly your heart rejoiceth," you never need be afraid of excess: let it be but the joy of a dependent being, and it cannot be too great.]

2. With thankfulness—

[It is your privilege to "sing in the ways of the Lord." In heaven the redeemed are singing praises to their God day and night: and so should you do on earth. As for David, he would "praise God day and night;" and that too with "all that was within him;" yea, and "as long as he should live." Not content with praising God himself, he would have the sun, moon, and stars, together with every thing that had life and breath, to praise him too^a. This is a state of mind worthy of a redeemed sinner; nor should we ever rest till we have attained it.]

We shall conclude this subject with two INQUIRIES:

1. Whence is it that so few possess this heavenly frame?

[It must be confessed, that amongst the professors of religion, there are but few comparatively in whom Christianity

^a Ps. cxlv. 1—7. and cxlviii. 1—14.

has its perfect work. Some are retarded in their growth by "the cares of this life, the deceitfulness of riches, or the lust of other things, and never bring forth fruit unto perfection." Others are remiss in the duties of the closet, and thereby deprive themselves of those rich communications of grace and peace, which God would otherwise bestow upon them. And others again are always poring over the evils of their own hearts, instead of contemplating the mercies of their God, and the wonders of redeeming love. It is not at all surprising that these different characters enjoy but little of that divine unction which is imparted to those only who live in close communion with their God. But let no man impute their want of joy to any defect in Christianity itself: they are not straitened in their God any more than David was: it is in themselves that they are straitened; and "they receive not, because they ask not." Let them only live nigh unto God in the exercise of prayer and faith, and they shall find that God is the same in every age, rich in mercy, and "abundant in goodness and truth."]

2. How may we all attain it?

[We have advantages far beyond any that David ever enjoyed. What he saw under a veil, we behold, as it were, with open face; a God incarnate, taking upon himself the entire care of all his people, standing between them and the curse of the broken law, and engaging to keep them by his own power unto everlasting salvation. For *us* there is "help laid upon One that is mighty:" for *us* there is all fulness treasured up in Christ, so that we are privileged to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^b" — — — Let us then improve this privilege as we ought to do: let us "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus," yea, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Then may we be assured of final victory, and now, even in the midst of all our conflicts, exult as already victors, yea, as "more than conquerors through Him that loved us^c."]

^b Isai. xlv. 24. See especially Isai. xxv. 4.

^c Rom. viii. 34—39. or Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

DXL.

GOD OUR SAVING STRENGTH.

Ps. xxviii. 8, 9. *The Lord is their strength, and he is the saving strength of his anointed. Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance: feed them also, and lift them up for ever!*

IN the Psalms of David we observe many rapid transitions from the depth of sorrow to very exalted

joy. In the psalm before us, this is very remarkable; insomuch, that commentators are altogether at a loss to determine whether it was written under a state of deep affliction, out of which he anticipates a joyful issue, or after a deliverance from affliction, combining with his expressions of gratitude a retrospective view of his preceding trouble. Of these two explications, I much prefer the latter; though I think even *that* far from satisfactory. I conceive that the suddenness of God's answers to prayer, and of the changes wrought thereby upon the feelings of his people, is here marked with very peculiar force and beauty. God has said, "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear^a:" and thus it was in this case. The Psalmist began in a state of extreme dejection; but, in a moment, "his light rose in obscurity, and his darkness became as the noon-day^b." The Psalmist elsewhere says, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing^c:" and thus we see it here realized; "Blessed be the Lord, because he hath heard the voice of my supplications." Then, after returning thanks to his great Deliverer, he proclaims, to the honour of God, what he will be to all his believing people; and he implores from God the same blessings in their behalf. Let us now consider,

I. His testimony for God—

He himself was "God's anointed." But of himself he had spoken in the preceding verse: "The Lord is *my* strength." Now, therefore, he speaks of God's peculiar people, even to the end of time. These all are partakers of the Spirit of Him who was "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows^d." Even under the Jewish dispensation, his people were "a kingdom of priests^e:" but, under the Christian dispensation, all the saints are "a royal priesthood^f," and have the privilege of being "made kings and

^a Isai. lxxv. 24.

^d Ps. xlv. 7.

^b Isai. lviii. 10.

^e Exod. xix. 6.

^c Ps. xxx. 11.

^f 1 Pet. ii. 9.

priests unto God and the Father^g:" and as all kings and priests under the Law were consecrated with oil, so are these "anointed of the Lord^h:" and they shall all find God to be "their strength, their saving strength." Now this is,

1. A true testimony—

[Search the records of the Bible in every age, and see whether so much as one of the Lord's anointed was not strengthened by him to do and suffer his holy will — — — Or say, whether many of you, my Brethren, are not able to attest the same, from your own experience; and to declare, that "out of weakness you have been made strongⁱ," and that God has been ever ready to "perfect his own strength in your weakness^k? — — —]

2. An encouraging testimony—

[There is not a man upon earth that has any strength in himself; no, "not so much as even to think a good thought^l." Yet, "through the grace of Christ strengthening us, the weakest babe in the universe is able to do all things^m." Our duties are arduous, our enemies mighty, our sufferings great: yet are we eventually made "more than conquerors, through Him who loved usⁿ." There is nothing, then, that we may not readily undertake for God, since "with Him there is everlasting strength^o;" and we are authorized to expect, under all possible circumstances, that "the grace of Christ shall be sufficient for us" — — —]

Persuaded of this blessed truth, let us mark,

II. His intercession, founded upon it—

Let us mark,

1. The copiousness of it—

[His heart was full: and just views of God invariably produce in us a measure of the same feelings towards man. "The Lord's anointed" are "his people and his inheritance^p:" and "if we love God, we cannot but love those who are begotten of him:" and in proportion as we feel our own obligations to God, will our hearts be enlarged in prayer for those who are dear unto him — — —]

2. The order of it—

[He begins with imploring their "salvation" from all

^g Rev. i. 6.

^h 2 Cor. i. 21.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 34.

^k 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^m Phil. iv. 13.

ⁿ Rom. viii. 37.

^o Isai. xxvi. 4.

^p 1 Kings viii. 51, 53.

guilt and danger. He then begs of God to load them with all "blessings" through this dreary wilderness. He entreats that they may be "fed," and "governed," and protected, as sheep by a careful shepherd, or as a faithful people by a wise and powerful Prince^q. And, lastly, he desires that they may be "exalted" to happiness and glory in a better world. Thus does he implore of God to confer on them all that they can ever need, "giving them grace and glory," and withholding from them nothing that can by any means conduce to their welfare^r.]

3. The extent of it—

[He desires these things for all, without exception. There is not one so good or great, but that he needs all these things at the hands of God; nor one so mean, but that he may expect of God a supply of all these things, in answer to the prayers thus offered for him.]

Behold, then, Brethren,

1. Your duty—

[God commands that we "make our intercession for all men." And, if we have any just knowledge of God, we shall improve our interest with him for the benefit of our fellow-creatures. Say not, "I know not how to pray." Well I know that this is a common complaint; but I am perfectly assured, that the straitness of which we complain, and perhaps justly complain, arises, in a very great measure, from our ignorance of God, and of the divine life. If we spread more our own wants before God, and obtained answers to our prayers, as David did, we should, like David, become intercessors for others, and find at the throne of grace a liberty of which we have at present but little conception— —]

2. Your privilege—

[Are you to ask all these things for others; and shall you want them yourselves? No, Brethren; you may ask salvation from all the penal effects of sin: you may ask for blessings, even all that a fallen creature can by any means want: you may ask for provision and protection to the utmost extent of your necessities: yea, you may ask for all the glory and felicity of heaven; and God will bestow it all. "Open your mouth ever so wide, he will fill it;" yea, "he will do exceeding abundantly for you above all that you can ask or think."]

^q In the Te Deum the words are quoted in this sense. . See also Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24.

^r Ps. lxxxiv. 11.

DXLI.

GOD THE GIVER OF STRENGTH AND PEACE.

Ps. xxix. 10, 11. *The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever. The Lord will give strength unto his people: the Lord will bless his people with peace.*

THIS psalm is supposed to have been written on the occasion of a thunder-storm. It represents the Deity as uttering his voice in those terrific sounds, whereby the very mountains are made to shake, yea and “skip, as it were, like a calf or a young unicorn.” That there is a transition to the Messiah, and his offices, is clear: for he is expressly declared to be King in Zion. And this declaration stands in immediate connexion with the floods and tumults by which, in appearance, he was for a season overwhelmed: “Why do the Heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I *set my King* upon my holy hill of Zion^a.” He is also called Jehovah: as it is written: “This is the name whereby he shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness^b.” And I rather think, that, in order the more strongly to mark his divine character, the name Jehovah is here so often repeated. It is repeated no less than *eighteen times* in these eleven verses: and it is the same person who is spoken of throughout the whole. The same person of whom the Psalmist says, in the first three verses, “Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength: give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness: the voice of the LORD is upon the waters; the God of glory thundereth; the LORD is upon many waters.”

^a Ps. ii. 1—6.^b Jer. xxiii. 6.

Of that same person does he say in my text, "The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace." That my text refers to him, there can be no doubt: for he is "that Mighty One, upon whom the help of his people is laid;" and he is, "The Prince of Peace," from whom all their peace must flow. We may therefore proceed to consider the Lord Jesus,

I. As a God of Providence—

["He is the Creator of all things," and "by him all things consist:" nor does any thing occur which is not done by him. We speak of things, indeed, as accidental; but there is nothing really casual, not even "the falling of a sparrow," or the loss of "a hair of our head." True it is, that creatures, for the most part, execute their own will, and oftentimes with an express desire to oppose the will of God. But they are all unconscious agents in his hands, accomplishing what "his counsel has determined before to be done." The envy of the priests, the treachery of Judas, the timidity of Pilate, the cruelty of the Roman soldiers, were all subservient to his designs, and all fulfilled his inscrutable purposes. "They, indeed, meant not so; neither did their heart think so:" they followed only the dictates of their own minds: but, in all their actions, "his counsel stood," and he accomplished through them his own sovereign and eternal will. Behold our blessed Lord, in every change of situation, from his apprehension to the grave: who would suppose that these were successive steps to the throne of heaven, and the means ordained for the salvation of the world? Yet this was really the case; and by all these events were a multitude of conflicting prophecies fulfilled. He sat at the helm, and directed all the storm. And precisely thus he does at this time also. The occurrences of every successive day seem as if they arose without order, and passed away without effect. But He who sees all things from the beginning has ordained that a sleepless night, an opening of a book, a casting of a lot, shall all as certainly effect his ends, as any event, however great, or however manifestly connected with his designs^c. The history of Joseph, so far as relates to the concurrence of contingent circumstances to the advancement of our welfare, is renewed at this time in many of us, whose elevation to a throne of glory is promoted by events which, to the eye of sense, would appear most calculated to counteract it. Be the storm ever so tempestuous,

^c Esther iii. 7. and vi. 1, 2.

“He sitteth upon the flood;” and be our enemies ever so mighty, “he sitteth King for ever,” to control their efforts, and overrule them for our good.]

But let us contemplate him,

II. As a God of grace—

The Lord Jesus Christ, on his ascension to heaven, was constituted “head over all things to his Church;” and a fulness was treasured up in him, for the use of his believing people in all ages. From this fulness he is ever ready to impart unto them,

1. Strength—

[Great, exceeding great, is the work which they have to perform, as are also the trials which they have to sustain. But, through him, the weakest of his people shall be able “to do all things^d,” and to suffer all things^e, as circumstances may require. Whatever be their situation, “their strength shall be according to their day^f,” and, however weak they be in themselves, “his strength shall be perfected in their weakness^g,” so seasonable shall be his supplies of grace to their souls, and so sufficient for all their necessities.]

2. Peace—

[In a storm, which menaced their destruction, the disciples were alarmed. But our blessed Lord reproved them for not having a more entire affiance in him^h. Whatever confederacies of men or devils may be against us, we should dismiss all fear, and “sanctify him in our hearts,” as all-sufficient for our protectionⁱ. It is said of all his people, “He will keep them in perfect peace, because they trust in him^k.” And well may they be in peace: for, being accepted of God, they may possess an assured peace with him^l, and, being upheld in his arms, they may laugh at all the assaults of their enemies: for, “if He be for them, who can be against them^m?” And this peace is a “blessing” of the highest order: for, as it is the exclusive privilege of the Lord’s peopleⁿ, so is it, both in its nature and operations, more excellent than can be adequately conceived: it truly “passes all understanding^o.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Give him, then, the glory due unto his name—

[We should get into the very spirit of the Psalmist, and have our minds filled with a sense of our Saviour’s power and

^d Phil. iv. 13.

^e Col. i. 11, 12.

^f Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^g 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^h Mark iv. 37—41.

ⁱ Isai. viii. 12—14.

^k Isai. xxvi. 3.

^l Rom. v. 1.

^m Rom. viii. 31.

ⁿ Isai. lvii. 1.

^o Phil. iv. 7.

grace — — — Yet praise him, not by words only, but by that perfect affiance which he calls for at your hands; and which is necessary, in order that you may realize the blessings he is exalted to bestow.]

2. Let his voice control every emotion of your souls—

[If he speak by thunders and lightnings, he speaks also by his word: and if by them he displays his power, by this he reveals his grace. Notice particularly how, in the psalm before us, every thing is ascribed to his voice. And sure I am, that, if you will listen to the still small voice of his word, there is not a blessing which you can possibly need, but it shall be imparted in the richest abundance to your souls.]

DXLII.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

Ps. xxx. 5. *His anger endureth but a moment: in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.*

IN the title affixed to this psalm, it is called “A psalm, or song, at the dedication of the house of David.” If we understand this as referring to a dedication of his house on his first entrance upon it^a, there is nothing in the psalm at all suitable to the occasion: but if we refer it to the period of his return to it after the death of Absalom, we shall find a suitability in it to the circumstances in which he had been placed^b. He had been driven from his throne at a time when he appeared to be most firmly fixed upon it; and had been in most imminent danger of his life, from the hands of his own favourite, but rebellious son, Absalom. God, however, had mercifully interposed for his deliverance, and had restored him once more in safety to his own house. To purify his house from the pollution it had sustained from Absalom, he dedicated it afresh; and penned this psalm, it should seem, for the occasion. But, as this is a matter of conjecture only, and not of certainty, I shall wave all further allusion to either of the occasions; and take the words of my text simply as expressing a most weighty truth, which is at all

^a 2 Sam. v. 11.

^b 2 Sam. xx. 5.

times, and under all circumstances, proper for our consideration.

Two things we shall notice from it.

I. The mercy of God—

The mercy of God will be found to be altogether of a boundless extent, whether we consider it,

1. As existing in his own bosom—

[He is indeed angry both at sin itself and at those who commit it: and his anger he will surely manifest against every impenitent transgressor. "His wrath is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men^c;" and it will surely "break forth against all the children of disobedience^d." Nevertheless, the inflicting of his judgments is "a strange act," to which he is utterly averse^e. "Mercy" is the attribute in which "he most delights^f;" and, when he proclaimed his name, it was that by which he most desired to be known: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin^g." The whole Scriptures represent him in this view, and declare, with one voice, that he is "*rich* in mercy^h," and that "his mercy is from everlasting to everlasting unto those who fear himⁱ."]]

2. As experienced by his people—

[Against the impenitent his anger must, of necessity, continue: but, towards the penitent and believing, it is of the shortest possible duration: "His anger endureth but for a moment." When Nathan pressed home upon the conscience of David the guilt he had contracted in the matter of Uriah, and had brought him to this acknowledgment, "I have sinned against the Lord," the prophet was instantly directed by God to declare, that his iniquity, notwithstanding the enormity of it, was pardoned: "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die^k." Had there been any bounds to his mercy, Manasseh could never have found acceptance with him. The wickedness of that monarch exceeded all that one would have supposed a human being was capable of committing: yet was even he pardoned, as soon as he humbled himself before his God^l. And how rapidly the mercy of God flies to the healing of the contrite soul, may be seen, as in numberless other instances, so in the psalm before us: "Hear, O Lord," said David, "and have mercy upon me: Lord, be thou my helper:" and then he immediately adds, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning

^c Rom. i. 18.

^d Eph. v. 6.

^e Isai. xxviii. 21.

^f Mic. vii. 18.

^g Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

^h Eph. ii. 4.

ⁱ Ps. ciii. 17.

^k 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^l 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness^m."]

The whole preceding context, whilst it declares God's mercy, sets also before us,

II. Our duty in the contemplation of it—

As having experienced mercy, we are called to sing, and praise our God. But, as we are not all in the holy frame of David, and as the text itself suggests views somewhat different from those of joyous exultation, I shall adhere rather to the words before us, and point out our duty, not so much in the contemplation of mercy enjoyed, as of mercy needed and desired.

Though God so delights in the exercise of mercy, yet he requires that we seek it at his handsⁿ. We must seek it,

1. Supremely—

["In his favour is life:" and the enjoyment of it must be our one object of pursuit. Not only must all earthly things be as nothing in our estimation, but life itself must be of no value in comparison of it. To have our interest in his favour a matter of doubt, must be as death to our souls: and we must live only to obtain reconciliation with him. What the frame of our minds, in reference to it, should be, we may see in those words of David: "I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord! my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit! Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me^o."]]

2. Humbly—

["Weeping may endure for a night." We should certainly weep and mourn for our sins, as our blessed Lord has told us in his sermon on the mount^p. And who amongst us has not just ground to weep? Who is there that has not reason to smite upon his breast with grief and shame for his past life, and, like David, to say, "I am weary with my groaning: all

^m ver. 10, 11. For the further elucidation of this, see Jer. iii. 12, 13, 14, 22. and iv. 1.

ⁿ Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^o Ps. cxliii. 6—8.

^p Matt. v. 4. with Luke vi. 20, 21.

the night make I my bed to swim: I water my couch with my tears^q?" This should be the experience of us all: "we must sow in tears, if ever we would reap in joy^r." Shall this be thought suited to the Mosaic dispensation only? It is not a whit less necessary under the Gospel dispensation: "Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned into mourning, and your joy into heaviness: humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord; and he shall lift you up."]

3. Confidently—

[We should never doubt God's readiness to accept us, when we return to him. Whether our night of weeping be more or less dark, or of a longer or shorter duration, we should feel assured that "a morning of joy shall come," when "there shall be given to us beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^s." In the contemplation of God's mercy as revealed in the Gospel, we should see, that he can be "a just God, and yet a Saviour^t;" yea, that because "he is *faithful* and *just*, he will forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness^u." To the exercise of his mercy *He* has assigned no limit: and *we* should assign none. We should be perfectly assured that "the blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse from all sin^x;" that "God will cast out none who come to him in his Son's name^y;" on the contrary, that "though our sins have been red like crimson," we shall, through the Redeemer's blood, "be made white as snow^z."]

In this view of our subject, I would call your attention to the following obvious and salutary reflections—

1. How deeply to be pitied are the blind impenitent world!

[They will not believe that God is angry with them, or that they have any need to dread his displeasure: and, if we attempt to convince them of their danger, they account us no better than gloomy enthusiasts. But, whether they will believe it or not, God's eye is upon them for evil; and if they turn not to him in penitence and faith, they shall ere long feel the weight of his avenging arm. Who that should see a multitude of persons enclosed, like Baal's priests, and unconscious of their impending fate, would not pity them? Yet here are millions of immortal souls soon to be summoned into the presence of their Judge, and setting at defiance the doom that speedily awaits them: should not "rivers of tears run

^q Ps. vi. 6.

^t Isai. xlv. 21.

^y John vi. 37.

^r Ps. cxxvi. 5.

^u 1 John i. 9.

^z Isai. i. 18.

^s Isai. lxi. 3.

^x 1 John i. 7.

down our eyes for *them*^a?" Yes, verily: as our Lord wept over Jerusalem in the view of the destruction that awaited it, and as the Apostle Paul had "great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart" on account of his unbelieving brethren^b, so should we mourn bitterly for those who will not mourn and be in bitterness for themselves.]

2. How richly to be congratulated is the weeping penitent!

[His carnal friends perhaps pity him for his weakness, or deride him for his folly. But the angels around the throne are of a very different mind: *they*, even in the presence of God himself, have an augmentation of their joy from one single spectacle like this^c: and God himself is not so intent on the heavenly hosts, but that he spies out such a poor object as this, and looks upon him with complacency and delight^d. Is there, then, here present one weeping penitent? I congratulate him, from my inmost soul. My Brother! crowns and kingdoms are of no value in comparison of the blessing conferred on thee. Be content to go on weeping, as long as God shall see fit to keep thee in that state of discipline: but know, that "joy is sown for thee;" and that, in due season, it shall spring up to an abundant harvest: for thus saith the Lord: "He that goeth on his way and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him^e."]]

3. What praises and thanksgivings are due from the pardoned sinner!

[At present you can have but little conception of the blessings conferred upon you: for you cannot see one thousandth part of your guilt, or conceive one thousandth part of the glory that awaits you: and still less can you comprehend the wonders of love and mercy that have been vouchsafed to you in the gift of God's only dear Son for your redemption. What indeed you do already know, is abundantly sufficient to fill your souls with unutterable joy, and your lips with incessant praise. But what will be your feelings at the instant of the departure of your soul from this earthly tabernacle, and of its admission into the presence of your God? Then you will see somewhat of the depth of misery from which you have been redeemed, and of the height of glory to which you are exalted; and will behold your Redeemer face to face; and join in all the songs of the redeemed: and look forward to eternity as the duration of your bliss. Surely these things should be ever on your minds: they should make you to be "looking for, and

^a Ps. cxix. 136.

^b Rom. ix. 2.

^c Luke xv. 10.

^d Isai. lxvi. 2.

^e Ps. cxxvi. 6.

hasting unto, the coming of that blessed day." But, suppose that your night of weeping were to continue to the very hour of your dissolution, how short would it appear, when once that morning burst upon your view ! Are you not ashamed that you should ever grudge the seed for such a harvest ? Will not one hour of that glory be an ample recompence for all the exertions you ever made for the attainment of it ? Go on, then, with heaven in your view : and live in the sweet anticipation of the glory that awaits you. Methinks the very prospect of such a morning constitutes its very dawn, and will be to your souls the commencement of heaven upon earth.]

DXLIII.

CAUSE AND CURE OF SPIRITUAL DESERTION.

Ps. xxx. 6—12. *In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved : Lord, by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong. Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. I cried to thee, O Lord ; and unto the Lord I made supplication : What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit ? Shall the dust praise thee ? shall it declare thy truth ? Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me ! Lord, be thou my helper ! Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing ; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness ; to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent : O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.*

AMONGST all the friends of vital godliness it is supposed that Christian experience is well understood : but it is a lamentable truth, that those in general who think themselves best acquainted with it, are exceedingly mistaken with respect to some of its most important parts. The distinctive offices of faith and unbelief, of confidence and fear, are by no means clearly defined in the minds either of ministers or people ; on the contrary, they are often so confounded as to produce very serious evils ; for by the misconceptions respecting them many are instructed to shun what God approves, and to cultivate what he abhors. For instance ; A persuasion that we are God's elect people, and that we are in no danger of perishing, is recommended by many as the root and summit of Christian faith ; whilst a fear lest we should have deceived ourselves, or should

ultimately perish, is characterized as an evil heart of unbelief: and thus, a godly jealousy over ourselves is discouraged as a sin, and an unfounded confidence respecting our state is encouraged as a virtue. These mistakes arise partly from a blind following of human authorities, and partly from being confined by the trammels of human systems. To have just views on these subjects is of great importance both for ministers and people; for ministers, that they may know how to discriminate between good and evil in their flocks; and to the people, that they may form such an estimate of themselves as God himself forms of them.

The psalm before us will afford us an occasion for marking the distinctions which we conceive to be so eminently useful, and yet so generally wanted. It is said in the title to have been written at the dedication of David's house; but we apprehend it was rather at the second dedication of it, after it had been shamefully defiled by Absalom. To this period of time, rather than to any other, we are directed by many parts of the psalm. It should seem that about that time the prosperity of David had lulled him into a state of undue security; and that God sent him this affliction to rouse him from it. The successive frames of his mind are here clearly marked; and must successively be considered as they are here presented to our view:

I. His carnal security—

[There being to all appearance perfect tranquillity in his kingdom, David conceived that no evil could arise to disturb his repose: and it seems that a similar confidence was also indulged by him in reference to his spiritual enemies. This is, indeed, the common effect of long continued prosperity: but it is a state of mind highly displeasing to God. We are dependent creatures: and ought at all times to feel, that whatever we have, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, is but lent to us from hour to hour, according to the good pleasure of Him, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." The very continuance of our lives should be regarded in this view; so that we should never think of what we will do in the next year, or even on the morrow, without an express reference to

God as the sovereign controller of all events^a. Job himself erred exceedingly in this respect, when he said, "I shall die in my nest^b." The same sense of dependence on God must more especially be maintained in reference to our spiritual life. The very chief of the Apostles, no less than we, needed to preserve upon his mind a consciousness, that, without incessant vigilance and care, he might, "after having preached to others, himself become a cast-away." However confident any man may be that he stands firm, it becomes him to "take heed lest he fall^c." And so far is this frame of mind from being, as religious people are apt to fancy it, an effect of legality and unbelief, it is pronounced by God himself as most pleasing to him, and beneficial to us; for "blessed is the man that feareth always^d."

It is worthy of observation, that David *ostensibly* acknowledged God as the author of his security; "Thou by thy favour hast made my mountain to stand strong:" but it is evident that his confidence was not really in God, so much as in his situation and circumstances, which had to all appearance a stability on which he might rely. And thus it is with those amongst ourselves who have fallen into a state of carnal security: they *profess* to depend on God; but their want of holy fear demonstrates, that their confidence is in something which they themselves possess, and which they consider as affording a just ground for the dismissal of vigilance and jealous apprehension.

David's relaxation of this salutary fear was followed by]

II. His spiritual dereliction—

[To punish this undue security, God withdrew from David in some measure the protection of his providence, and the comforts of his grace: he suffered Absalom to carry into effect his traitorous conspiracy against him; and he left David without those heavenly consolations which under former trials he had been wont to experience: "Thou didst hide thy face from me," says David, "and I was troubled." Now such rebukes must be expected by all who forget their dependence upon God. "Verily he is a God that hideth himself;" and by the dispensations of his providence and grace he marks his indignation against the backslidings of his people. We doubt not but that his withdrawment of many temporal blessings from us is a punishment for our idolatrous attachment to them, and dependence upon them. It was for this that he sent a worm to destroy Jonah's gourd; and for this he required the soul of him who thought "he had much goods laid up for many years." We doubt not also but that the experience of every child of God will more or less attest the same in reference to the

^a Jam. iv. 13—15.

^b Job xxix. 18.

^c 1 Cor. x. 12.

^d Prov. xxviii. 14.

withdrawment of his presence from them. In proportion as any have become less vigilant, they lose those manifestations of the Divine presence which in the seasons of holy fear they were privileged to enjoy. Nor is it a mere privation of joy which they experience on such occasions; there is a perturbation of mind arising from a sense of the Divine displeasure, and a painful apprehension lest they should never be restored to the favour of their God. David's "trouble," as arising from this source, was of a very overwhelming nature^e: and woe be to those who wantonly provoke God to inflict it on them^f.

In what way he sought deliverance from this trouble, we see by,]

III. His fervent prayers—

[“He cried unto the Lord, and (as it is in the Prayer-book translation) gat him to his Lord right humbly.” How he pleaded with God, may be seen in our text; and in this he affords an excellent pattern for us under similar circumstances. His plea is to this effect; ‘Lord, withdraw not thyself from me for ever: it is through thy help alone that I can ever recover the state from which I am fallen; and without such a recovery I can never bring any glory to thy name. O leave me not in the wretched state into which I am fallen.’

Now here we see the true, the only, remedy for a soul that has provoked God to depart from it. To have recourse to the doctrines of election and final perseverance under such circumstances, is the way to foster that very disease which God is seeking, by this discipline, to cure. We say not that we are to keep out of sight the promises of God; for beyond a doubt we are to make use of them at all times and on all occasions: but then we are to make use of them, *not for the fostering of an unhumbléd confidence in God, but for the encouraging of our humiliation before God.* We are to be constantly on our guard “not to heal our wounds slightly, or to cry, Peace, peace! when there is no peace.” We should bear in mind that the humbling of our souls is the very end which God aims at in withdrawing his presence from us: and the more we answer this end, the better: nay, if by the suspension of his favour towards us we be brought to a more earnest crying after him, and to an utter abhorrence of ourselves in dust and ashes, we shall have as much reason to adore him for such discipline, as for the most exalted joys he ever afforded us.

This also is a point which we conceive to be of exceeding great importance for the due regulation of our own minds, and for the right counselling of those who are under the hidings of God's face.

The excellence and efficacy of this remedy may be seen in,]

^e Ps. lxxvii. 2—4.

^f Deut. xxxii. 20.

IV. His speedy recovery—

[Many there are who go mourning almost all their lives. And wherefore? Is it that God arbitrarily, and without occasion, hides his face from them? No: it is owing to this very thing which we have been speaking of, namely, their restraining prayer before God, and not using the proper means of regaining his favour. Indeed many are brought into absolute despair by the very means which they use to remove their apprehensions: they go to the consideration of God's secret decrees, when they should be mourning over their miscarriages, and imploring pardon for Christ's sake. Hence they are led to argue thus: 'If an elect vessel, how could I be in such darkness and distress? But I am in this darkness, therefore God has not elected me; and there is no hope for me.' But behold the effect of humiliation and contrition! See how speedily God returned to the soul of his servant, in answer to his fervent supplications! The prayers were scarcely offered, before David was enabled to say, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness." And thus would it be with all of us, if we would pursue the method which this holy man adopted. "God delighteth in the prosperity of his servants:" and, as a parent feels relief to his own soul when he can return in love to his offending child, so does God, when he can again lift up the light of his countenance on those, from whom he has been constrained for a season to withhold it^g. The father's reception of his prodigal son is a sure and delightful specimen of the favour which all will experience, as soon as ever they are brought to the footstool of Divine grace with cries for mercy in the all-prevailing name of Jesus Christ. The testimony of David in this very psalm shall be confirmed in you: "His anger endureth but a moment: in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning"^h."

The speedy restoration of God's favour to him immediately drew forth,]

V. His grateful acknowledgments—

[To bring him back to a state of holy peace and joy was the very end for which God so graciously renewed to him the expressions of his love: it was, says David, "to the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent." He calls his tongue "his glory," because that is the member by which above all he could glorify his God: and he determines instantly to employ it in his praise: "O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever." Blessed resolution! O that every one of us would instantly adopt it! O that God would

^g See Jer. xiii. 27. and Ps. lxxxi. 13—16.

^h ver. 5.

inspire us with grace sufficient to carry it into execution ! It is in order to bring all to this, that we have been so particular in the foregoing statement. It is with a view to this that we so earnestly recommend humiliation before God under seasons of darkness, rather than an attention to abstract points which tend only to foster a delusion. Humility, and contrition, and a believing application of the blood of Christ to our souls, can never deceive us ; but, on the contrary, must infallibly lead to songs of praise and thanksgiving : “ if we sow in tears, we must reap in joy.” Only observe the process, and see how connected are all the links of the chain : in prosperity, we have relapsed into *carnal confidence*, and provoked God to leave us in a state of *spiritual dereliction* : alarmed and humbled by his frowns, we betake ourselves to *fervent prayer*, imploring mercy in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and through the unbounded grace of God we experience a *speedy recovery* ; and from thenceforth have our mouths filled with *grateful acknowledgments* to the God of our salvation. We only add to this, that the deeper is our humiliation on account of sin committed, the more speedy and exalted will be our joys on account of deliverance vouchsafed.]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are walking with God—

[What shall we say ! Even if you were as eminent as ever David was, we should think it right to guard you against the conceit, that you were in no danger of being “ moved.” In relation to all that you possess of temporal things, we would inculcate this salutary lesson, “ Let those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who weep be as though they wept not, and those who rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and those who buy as though they possessed not, and those that use this world, as not abusing it.” Every thing must be held as from God, and for God, to be disposed of according to his sovereign will and pleasure. And in reference to every thing of a spiritual nature, we would recommend a constant sense of our entire dependence upon God, saying, “ Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.” Some will confound this with unbelief : but it differs from unbelief as much as humility from pride : in truth, it is the very root of faith ; for it is only in proportion as we feel our liability to fall, that we shall look truly and constantly to Christ for strength. Be weak as new-born infants in yourselves, and God will keep beneath you his everlasting arms, and perfect “ his own strength in your weakness.”]

2. To those who have declined from him—

[Many in a state of declension are ready to imagine that

God has arbitrarily and without any particular cause withdrawn himself from them. But it may well be doubted whether in any case God ever dealt thus with any of his creatures. Our blessed Lord, when he cried, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" was suffering the punishment due to those whose iniquities had been laid on him. And Job, whose expression, "I shall die in my nest," we have before noticed, had evidently a measure of carnal confidence which wanted to be mortified and subdued. With the exception of his case we are not aware of any thing that bears even the appearance of arbitrary proceeding on the part of God: the constant tenor of his acting is that which was proclaimed to Asa, "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him: if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake youⁱ." Learn then to trace your sin in your punishment: and, if you cannot find the immediate cause of his withdrawal from you, pray to him, with Job, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." The prayer which David offered under such circumstances^k, will assuredly, if offered up in faith, bring down upon you the blessings of peace and joy. This God himself has promised^l — — — and you may be as fully assured of its accomplishment to your soul, as the promise and oath of God can make you^m — — —]

ⁱ 2 Chron. xv. 2.^k Ps. cxliii. 1—8.^l Isai. lvii. 16—18.^m Isai. liv. 7—10. with Heb. vi. 17, 18.

DXLIV.

OUR TIMES IN GOD'S HAND.

Ps. xxxi. 15. *My times are in thy hand.*

TO the ungodly it is a satisfaction to deny the providence of God, and to cut him off, as it were, from any connexion with his creatures. But the saints find a rich consolation in the thought that God reigneth. This it is which reconciles them to the evils they endure, and fortifies them against those which they have reason to apprehend. David, in the psalm before us, complains that there were many who "took counsel together against him, and devised to take away his life." But he comforted himself in the reflection, that, however *man* might be his enemy, *God* was "his God;" and that however bitterly his enemies might be enraged against him, "his times were not in *their* hands, but in *God's*;" and,

consequently, that they could do nothing against him but by His permission.

From this view of the text we are led to notice,

I. Our dependence on God—

God is the Governor of the universe: he appoints the stars their courses; he makes the raging elements to fulfil his will^a; he imposes a restraint upon the most savage beasts, causing them to suppress^b or forget^c their instinctive ferocity, or overruling the exercise of it, for the preservation^d or destruction of men^e, as he sees occasion. The affairs of men he more especially controls. In his hands are,

1. The occurrences of life—

[There is nothing really casual or contingent in the world. It is God that disposes of us from our earliest infancy to the latest hour of our lives. “He determines the bounds of our habitation^f.” If we are called to the possession of wealth, or deprived of it by any untoward circumstances, it is “the Lord who gives, and the Lord who taketh it away^g.” If we enjoy health, or pine away in sickness, it is “the Lord who both wounds and heals, who kills and makes alive^h.” “There is neither good nor evil in the city, but the Lord is the doer of itⁱ.” Even the falling of a hair of our head, trifling as it is, takes not place but by his appointment^k.]

2. The seasons of death—

[To every man “there is an appointed time upon earth^l.” there are “bounds which he cannot pass^m.” “God holdeth our souls in lifeⁿ.” and “when he taketh away our breath, we die, and return to the dust^o.” Youth and health are no security against the stroke of death: the most vigorous constitutions are soon broken, when God is pleased to afflict us^p: the skill of physicians, however useful when attended with his blessing, is of no avail^q. So numerous are the occasions of death, that no caution can possibly avoid them: “a man may flee from a lion, and a bear meet him; or he may go into a house for safety, and a serpent bite him^r.” When God “requires our souls,” we must surrender them at his call^s.” Our days are protracted to an advanced age, if he be pleased to uphold us;

^a Ps. cxlviii. 8.

^b 1 Kings xiii. 28.

^c Dan. vi. 22.

^d Jonah i. 17.

^e 2 Kings ii. 24.

^f Acts xvii. 26.

^g Job i. 21.

^h 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7.

ⁱ Amos iii. 6.

^k Matt. x. 30.

^l Job vii. 1.

^m Job xiv. 5.

ⁿ Ps. lxxvi. 9.

^o Ps. civ. 29.

^p Job xxi. 23—25.

^q Mark v. 26.

^r Amos v. 19.

^s Luke xii. 20.

if not, our course is finished as soon as ever it is commenced. It is "in God, and in God alone, that we live, and move, and have our being^t."

But though these ideas are certainly comprehended in the text, its more immediate scope is to declare,

II. Our security in God—

We have already observed, that the words of the text were introduced by David as a consolatory reflection, under the cruel treatment which he had received from friends and enemies. We are therefore taught by them to assure ourselves,

1. That none can destroy us before our time—

[We appear to be, yea, we really are, in the midst of many and great dangers. But however we may be encompassed with enemies, they cannot prevail against us till the Lord's time for our removal is come. David was continually exposed to the rage and jealousy of Saul, who repeatedly cast a javelin at him, and hunted him incessantly with armed hosts "like a partridge upon the mountains." Yet though he was often in the most imminent danger^u, and certainly would have been betrayed by the men of Keilah^x, yet God watched over him, and kept him in perfect safety. Many sought to apprehend our Lord; but "they could not lay hands on him till his hour was come^y:" and even then Pilate "could have had no power against him, unless it had been given him from above^z." Paul was in perils innumerable, "and in deaths oft^a:" once he was stoned, and even left for dead^b; but none could take away his life, till he had finished the course marked out for him. Thus we also are immortal, till our work is done. We are surrounded with "chariots of fire, and horses of fire^c:" yea, "God himself is a wall of fire round about us^d." And sooner shall successive bands of enemies be struck dead upon the spot by fire from heaven^e, than one of the Lord's little ones shall perish^f.]

2. That none shall hurt us without his permission—

[As we depend on God for our happiness as well as for our existence, so are both our being and our well-being secured by him. Satan could not touch the person or the property of Job, till he had obtained leave of God to do so^g. "Nor can any weapon that is formed against us, prosper^h," any further than

^t Acts xvii. 28. ^u 1 Sam. xxiii. 26. ^x 1 Sam. xxiii. 11, 12.

^y John vii. 30. and viii. 20. Luke xiii. 33. ^z John xix. 11.

^a 2 Cor. xi. 23—27. ^b Acts xiv. 19, 20. ^c 2 Kings vi. 17.

^d Zech. ii. 5. ^e 2 Kings i. 10—12. ^f Matt. xviii. 14.

^g Job i. 12. and ii. 6. ^h Isai. liv. 17.

our God shall see good to permit it. "His angels encamp round about usⁱ," and have an especial charge to "keep us in all our ways, that we dash not our foot against a stone^k." "Neither the arrow that flieth by day, nor the pestilence that walketh in darkness, can hurt us. Thousands may fall at our side, and ten thousands at our right hand; but it shall not come nigh us^l."

We are not indeed at liberty to rush needlessly into danger, from an expectation that God will deliver us; (this were to "tempt the Lord our God^m;") but in the path of duty we have nothing to fear: we may "tread upon the lion, the adder, or the dragonⁿ;" we may drink poison itself^o, or suffer ourselves to be committed to the flames, without experiencing the smallest injury^p: nothing in the whole universe can "harm us, if we be followers of that which is good^q:" if God see fit to keep us, we are as safe "in a den of lions" as in a house of friends.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. To seek God without delay—

[There is no period of life when we can call one day, or one hour, our own. We are altogether "in God's hands;" and, if he withdraw his support for one moment, we perish, as certainly as a stone gravitates to the earth. Shall we then, when so entirely dependent on our God, provoke him to cast us out of his hands? Shall we continue to despise his patience and forbearance, till he swear in his wrath that our "time shall be no longer^r?" Think, how many have lost the time afforded them, and how bitterly they now bewail their folly: and beg of God, that he would "so teach you to number your days, that you may apply your hearts unto wisdom^s."]]

2. To serve him without fear—

[We are too apt to keep back from serving God through fear of the persecutions we may endure from man. But, if our times be in God's hands, all our concerns must be there too; and nothing can befall us but by his appointment, "Who art thou, then, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker^t?" Are we not told, that "the wrath of man shall praise him; and that the remainder of it he shall restrain^u?" Be bold then for God; "set your face as a flint against the whole world^x," and trust in him for protection. He will not indeed screen you from all trials; because it is on many accounts necessary that you should feel them^y:

ⁱ Ps. xxxiv. 7.

^m Matt. iv. 6, 7.

^o Mark xvi. 18.

^r Rev. x. 6.

^u Ps. lxxvi. 10.

^k Ps. xci. 11, 12.

ⁿ Ps. xci. 13. Acts xxviii. 3—6.

^p Dan. iii. 25—27.

^s Ps. xc. 12.

^x Isai. xlix. 7—9.

^l Ps. xci. 5—7.

^q 1 Pet. iii. 13.

^t Isai. li. 12, 13.

^y 1 Pet. i. 6.

but he will suffer none to come upon you which he will not enable you to bear, none which he will not sanctify to your eternal good^z.

3. To trust him without carefulness—

[It is foolish as well as impious to distrust God, or to murmur at any of his dispensations. In whose hands could the disposal of all events be placed so much to our advantage, as in his, who possesses infinite wisdom to devise what is best, and infinite power to effect it? Would we be made the sport of chance or fortune? Or would we have our present and everlasting concerns left wholly to our own management? If we are not fit to regulate our temporal affairs till we attain the age of manhood, how much less can we ever be competent to take the reins of God's government into our own hands, and to order the affairs of his kingdom? But our times will be in God's hands, whether we acquiesce in it or not. Let us therefore contentedly leave ourselves to his all-wise disposal, assured that "he doeth all things well," and will make "all things to work together for good to them that love him."]

^z 1 Cor. x. 13.

DXLV.

THE GOODNESS OF GOD TO HIS BELIEVING PEOPLE.

Ps. xxxi. 19, 20. *Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.*

THE salvation of the Gospel is a present salvation: the "godliness which it inspires is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come." It is needless to say that the trials of life are great; and that men in every situation of life need the supports and consolations of religion to carry them through the difficulties which they have to encounter. But of the extent to which these supports and consolations are administered to God's chosen people, very little idea can be formed by those who have never experienced a communication of them to their souls. David was highly favoured in this respect. He lived in a state of near and habitual fellowship with

God; spreading before him all his wants, and receiving from him such supplies of grace and peace as his daily necessities required. Hence with devout rapture he expresses his admiration of God's goodness to his believing people.

This is the subject which we propose for our present meditation; and which, in correspondence with the words of our text, we shall consider,

I. In a general view—

The terms by which the Lord's people are characterized sufficiently distinguish them from all others, since none but they do truly "fear God," or unfeignedly "put their trust in him." They are the true Israel; in reference to whom it is said, "God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart^a."

In speaking of his goodness to them, we shall notice,

1. That which is "laid up for them"—

[In the time of David the great truths of the Gospel were but indistinctly known; the fuller manifestation of them being reserved for the Apostolic age: as St. Paul, quoting a remarkable passage from the Prophet Isaiah, says; "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;" and then adds, "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit^b." To the Jewish Church therefore these things are only "laid up," as it were, in types and prophecies: and though made known in the Gospel, they are still but imperfectly viewed by the Christian world; and may be considered as "laid up" for the Church at this time, no less than in former ages: for it is only by slow degrees that any one attains to the knowledge of them; and whatever attainments any one may have made, he sees only "as in a glass darkly, and knows only in part;" there being in it a length and breadth and depth and height utterly beyond the power of any finite intelligence to explore^c. The "riches" that are stored up for us in Christ even in this world are altogether "unsearchable^d:" what then must the glories be which are "reserved in heaven for us!" The more we contemplate the blessings which God has treasured up for us in the Son of his love — — —, the more shall we exclaim with David, "Oh how great is his goodness!"]

^a Ps. lxxiii. 1.

^c Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^b Isai. lxiv. 4. with 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10

^d Eph. iii. 8.

2. That which God has actually "wrought for them"—

[Every believer was once "dead in trespasses and sins," even as others. But he has been quickened by the mighty energy of God's Spirit, and been raised up to newness of life. He is "a new creature in Christ Jesus;" all his views, his desires, his purposes, being altogether changed — — — He has the heart of stone taken from him, and a heart of flesh substituted in its place. He has been "made a partaker of the divine nature," and "been renewed after God's image; and *that*, not in knowledge only, but in righteousness also and true holiness." He is brought altogether into a new state, having been "translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," and been made "an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ." In a word, he is "begotten to an inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and never-fading, reserved in heaven for him;" and for the full possession of which he also is *reserved* by the power of God, through the simple exercise of faith^e — — — All this he has wrought for them "before the sons of men." They are evidently "a seed which the Lord has blessed:" they are "lights in a dark world," "epistles of Christ, known and read of all men" — — —]

But in the latter part of our text, we are called to consider the goodness of God towards his people,

II. With a particular reference to their intercourse with the ungodly world—

Exceeding bitter are those pains which men inflict on each other by calumnies and reproaches—

[To speak good one of another affords no particular pleasure; but to hear and circulate some evil report affords to the carnal mind the highest gratification: and in such employment all the corruptions of our fallen nature find ample scope for exercise and indulgence. Who can estimate the evils arising from "pride," and "the strife of tongues?" Some little idea may be formed from the description given of the tongue by an inspired Apostle: "Behold," says he, "how great a matter a little fire kindleth! The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue amongst our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell^f." How exceedingly strong are these terms! Yet it is by no means an exaggerated statement of the evils proceeding from calumny in the world at large: but as representing the virulence and malignity with which men calumniate the people of God, they come yet nearer to the truth. In the

^e 2 Pet. i. 4.

^f Jam. iii. 5, 6.

very words preceding my text, David faintly portrays the conduct of the ungodly in relation to this matter: "Let the lying lips be put to silence, which speak *grievous* things *proudly* and *contemptuously* against the righteous." In another psalm he speaks in far stronger terms: "My soul," says he, "is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword^g." The truth is, that men can inflict, and often do inflict, far deeper wounds with their tongue than they could with the most powerful weapon. With a sword they can only wound the body: but with bitter and cruel words they wound the inmost soul. Under the former we may easily support ourselves; but "a wounded spirit who can bear?"

But against these does God provide for his people an effectual antidote—

[Though more exposed than others to the venomous assaults of slander, they have a refuge which the worldling knows not of. They carry their trials to the Lord, and spread them before him; and from him they receive such supports and consolations as more than counterbalance the evils they sustain. "In the secret of God's presence they are hid." When nigh to him in prayer, they are hid as in a pavilion, or a royal tent, protected by armed hosts, and furnished with the richest viands^h. But the full import of these terms cannot adequately be expressed. Who shall say what is implied in those words, "The secret of God's presence?" who shall declare what a fulness of joy is there possessed by the believing suppliant? How powerless are the fiery darts which are hurled at him by the most envenomed foes, whilst God himself is a wall of fire round about him, and the glory of God irradiates his soul, inspiring it with a foretaste of heaven itself! Some little idea of his enjoyment may be formed from the history of Hezekiah at the time of Sennacherib's invasion. It was "a day of trouble, and of rebuke and blasphemy;" and the feelings excited in the bosom of Hezekiah were most distressing: but scarcely had he spread before the Lord the letter which the blaspheming Rabshakeh had sent him, than he was encouraged by God to return this triumphant answer; "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at theeⁱ." Thus, like one who saw "the heavens filled with horses of fire and chariots of fire" for his protection, he set at nought the vain boasts of his enemies, and anticipated a certain triumph. Thus, how malignant soever the believer's enemies may be, he is hid from them as in an impregnable

^g Ps. lvii. 4. ^h Ps. xxvii. 5, 6. ⁱ Isai. xxxvii. 3, 14, 21, 22.

fortress, and looks down on their fruitless efforts with pity and contempt.]

ADDRESS—

1. Let us seek to attain the character here drawn—

[To fear God is the duty, and to trust in him the privilege, of every child of man — — — Learn then to tremble for fear of his judgments, and to rely on his mercy as revealed to you in his Gospel — — — for then only can you experience the blessings of his goodness, when you surrender up yourselves to him to be saved by his grace — — —]

2. Let us enjoy the privileges conferred upon us—

[For a fuller discovery of the believer's privileges, we may consult the declarations of David in the Psalms^k — — — Let us not rest in any thing short of them. Let us get such a sense of them as shall overwhelm us with wonder, and gratitude, and praise — — —]

^k Ps. xci. 1—4, 9—16. and lv. 21, 22.

DXLVI.

THE GODLY ENCOURAGED TO TRUST IN GOD.

Ps. xxxi. 21—24. *Blessed be the Lord : for he hath shewed me his marvellous kindness in a strong city. For I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes : nevertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee. O love the Lord, all ye his saints : for the Lord preserveth the faithful, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.*

THE use of biography is universally acknowledged. It leads us into the recesses of domestic life ; and teaches us, either from the frailties or the excellencies of others, how to conduct ourselves in a great variety of emergencies, which we ourselves must expect to meet with in life. But sacred biography is infinitely more interesting than that which proceeds only from uninspired pens, because the circumstances which are brought to light are more minute—more diversified—more authentic, than any records which people would choose to give of themselves, or than others would be capable of giving respecting them. On this account the Psalms of David claim the highest possible

regard. Perhaps there never was a man whose circumstances were more varied than his: and certainly there never was a man who committed to writing all the secret motions of his heart with more fidelity than he; or that laboured more to improve them for the benefit of mankind.

This appears, as in many other psalms, so especially in that before us; as will be clearly seen, whilst we notice,

I. His acknowledgment of mercies conferred upon him—

To enter fully into this, we must refer to the occasion on which the psalm was penned. It was written, I apprehend, after his deliverance from Saul, when, from his being surrounded by Saul's army, he had conceived it impossible for him to escape. Indeed, his deliverance was truly "marvellous;" and it was wrought by the special intervention of Almighty God, in answer to his prayer. At the very moment that his blood-thirsty persecutor had, to all appearance, effected his purpose, tidings came that the Philistines had invaded the land of Judah; and Saul was compelled to return instantly from his pursuit of David, in order to repel the invaders^a. In reference to these circumstances, David first acknowledges the mercy *in general terms*: "Blessed be the Lord; for he hath shewed his marvellous kindness in a strong city," that is, in "the strong holds" to which he had fled: and then he specifies *more particularly* the relief he had found in answer to prayer, when his own mind was overwhelmed with desponding fears.

In the peaceful state of the Church at this day, we are not likely to be reduced to David's state for our religion's sake: and, therefore, as far as the literal sense of the psalm goes, it is not applicable to us. But, of deliverances equally "marvellous," we may speak. Let me then ask,

1. Whether you have not, at times, been ready to despond?

^a 1 Sam. xxiii. 27, 28.

[We can know but little either of our guilt or corruption, if we have not “had the sentence of death in ourselves^b,” and felt that we had “no sufficiency in ourselves” to save ourselves^c. Have we never, then, under a sense of our extreme unworthiness and helplessness, been ready to doubt whether we could finally attain salvation, and “said, as it were, in our haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes?” Go back to some particular seasons, when your great adversary has prevailed against you, and seemed as if, like a roaring lion, he would utterly destroy you: has it not, at such seasons, been difficult to lay hold on the divine promises, and to flee for refuge to the hope set before you? — — —]

2. Whether God have not at such seasons interposed for you, in answer to your prayer?

[There are few that have not had reason to “bless and adore their God, for shewing them his marvellous kindness in such seasons as these. The experience of the Prophet Jeremiah has been realized by God’s people in every age: “Waters flowed over my head. Then I said, I am cut off. I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice, and not hid thine ear at my breathing and my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not^d.” From you, then, the Psalmist’s acknowledgment is due: and by you it should be made to the latest hour of your lives.]

Full of gratitude, he pours forth,

II. His exhortations, founded on his own experience—
He exhorts the saints,

1. To love God—

[God is worthy to be loved for his own divine excellencies: but he should be loved also for the wisdom and equity of his dispensations. “The faithful he does and will preserve:” yes, both from men and devils will he preserve them: he will “hide them under the shadow of his wings,” and “keep them even as the apple of his eye” — — — But “the proud doer, whosoever he may be, he will plentifully reward” with judgments proportioned to his impiety — — — The ungodly may indeed triumph for a time, and the godly be left to groan under the rod of the oppressor: but a day of righteous retribution is at hand, when “God will recompense tribulation to those who trouble his people; and to those who are troubled, rest^e” — — — Shall not the assurance of this be a comfort to the saints, even under their deepest troubles? Surely it should — — — so that

^b 2 Cor. i. 9.

^c 2 Cor. iii. 5.

^d Lam. iii. 54—57.

^e 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.

I may well urge upon them the exhortation before us: “O love the Lord, all ye his saints.”]

2. To trust in God—

[There are seasons when the saints can scarcely be said to *believe* and *trust*, whilst yet they do *hope* in God; saying, as it were, “If I perish, I will perish at his footstool, crying for mercy.” Now then, to all such persons I say, “God will strengthen your heart,” yea, and strengthen your arm too, so that “the arms of your hands shall be made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob^f.” He will even “perfect his own strength in your weakness,” so that no enemy shall be able to prevail against you. “Be of good courage,” then, my Brethren. Though you cannot fully *trust* in God, yet, if you can *hope* in him, be not afraid: for God will vindicate your cause, and “bruise all your enemies, not excepting even Satan himself, under your feet shortly^g.”]

EXHORTATION—

1. Learn to see and to acknowledge the mercies of God towards you—

[What loss is sustained, both of comfort to the saints, and of honour to the Deity, by the inattention of men to the dispensations of their God! How many deliverances, both temporal and spiritual, have we all experienced; but of which, through our remissness, God has never received any tribute of praise! — — — Know ye, that if ye will be observant of God’s dealings towards you, you will never want a theme for gratitude and praise — — —]

2. Be not satisfied with your own happiness, but seek to advance also the happiness of others—

[David never celebrates any mercy vouchsafed to him, without improving it as an occasion for commending God to others, and exhorting them to unite with him in every possible expression of love and gratitude. Thus should it be with us also. We are not, indeed, called to make known to all the secret workings of our own hearts; but we are called to edify one another, and to take every suitable occasion of honouring our God. Let us, then, do this; and do it, too, with holy zeal. Let us “abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, that all his works may praise him, and all his saints may bless him^h.”]

^f Gen. xlix. 24.

^g Rom. xvi. 20.

^h Ps. cxlv. 5—10.

DXLVII.

TRUE BLESSEDNESS DECLARED.

Ps. xxxii. 1—6. *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long : (for day and night thy hand was heavy upon me :) my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found.*

TO have the experience of David in all the diversified conditions of life faithfully submitted to us, is an advantage for which we can never be sufficiently thankful. There was scarcely any trouble, either of a temporal or spiritual nature, which he was not called to endure, and under which he has not stated to us the workings of his mind. We are accustomed to hear of his sins and his penitence, his sorrows and his joys: but there is one particular frame of mind, in which he continued for many months, which we are apt, for the most part, to overlook, or to pass by with a mere transient observation; I mean, his state of impenitence and hardness of heart after the commission of his sin in the matter of Uriah. But this is an exceedingly profitable point of view in which to behold him, because of the general tendency of sin to harden the heart: and to see how he obtained peace at last is also of great advantage, inasmuch as it will shew us, how we may obtain peace, even after the commission of the greatest transgressions. When he wrote this psalm he had regained that happy state from which he had fallen: and he here records, for the instruction of the Church in all future ages,

I. Wherein true blessedness consists—

A man who has no prospects beyond this present world, will seek happiness in the things of time and sense. But “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.” We

are immortal beings, and are hastening to a state, where a period will arrive, at which our present existence, even though it should have been continued a thousand years, will have been only as the twinkling of an eye. In that state either happiness or misery awaits us, according as we enter upon it under the guilt of our former sins, or with our sins forgiven. We may justly say, therefore, True happiness consists, as our text informs us, in having our sins forgiven. To elucidate this topic, let us consider the blessing here spoken of,

1. As a non-imputation of sin—

[Who that is in the smallest degree conscious of the number and heinousness of his transgressions, and of the awful punishment due to him on account of them, must not regard it as an unspeakable mercy to have them all blotted out from the book of God's remembrance? What in the whole universe can in his estimation be compared with this? If he could possess the whole world, yea, if he could possess ten thousand worlds, what comfort would the acquisition give him, if he had the melancholy prospect of being speedily plunged into the bottomless abyss of hell? If there were a large company of condemned criminals, some rich and noble, others poor and ignoble, and one of the meanest of them had received the king's pardon whilst all the rest were left for execution; who among them would be accounted the happiest? How much more then, when the death to which unpardoned sinners are consigned is an everlasting death in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone! No one who reads the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, and sees the termination of their respective states, can for a moment hesitate to pronounce Lazarus, with all his miseries and privations, far happier in a sense of reconciliation with his God, than the rich worldling in the enjoyment of all his pomp and luxury.]

2. As a positive imputation of righteousness—

[In the words of David we should not have seen the doctrine of imputed righteousness, if St. Paul had not expressly told us that that doctrine was contained in them. He tells us^a, that in these words "David describeth the blessedness of the man *unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Now this idea goeth much farther than

^a Rom. iv. 6—8.

mere forgiveness: forgiveness exempts from punishment; but an imputation of the Redeemer's righteousness to us insures to us an eternal great reward^b. O how happy must that man be who is clothed in the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness, and can, on the footing of that righteousness, claim all the glory and felicity of heaven! He may look forward to death and judgment, not only without fear but with holy confidence and joy, assured, that in God's sight he stands "without spot or blemish." Who, we would ask, can be happy, like the man who has been begotten to a lively hope, that in and through Christ, there is reserved for him an incorruptible, and undefiled, and never-fading inheritance in heaven?]

3. As a renovation of soul consequent on reconciliation with God—

[Though sin is pardoned, and righteousness is imputed, purely through the free grace of God to the chief of sinners, without any good works already performed by them^c, yet no pardoned sinner is left in an unholy state: on the contrary, he is "renewed in the spirit of his mind;" "a new heart is given unto him;" and he is made "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." If this were not the case, pardon itself could not make him happy. A soul under the dominion of sin could not be happy, even if it were in heaven: sin would eat his vitals, as doth a canker. It is the restoration of the soul to the Divine image that constitutes a very principal part of its felicity: for when we are "holy, as God is holy," then are we happy, as God is happy. We must be careful however not to confound those different sources of happiness. St. Paul was so jealous on this head, that when quoting the words of our text, he omitted these at the close of it, lest any one should imagine that our sanctification were in any respect the ground of our justification before God. Sanctification is the fruit and consequence of our having received a justifying righteousness: and, though it in no respect procures our reconciliation with God in the first instance, (for *that* is procured solely through faith in Christ,) yet it is as inseparably connected with justifying faith, as good fruit is with a good tree: nor can the soul be happy in a sense of the Divine favour, till it has this *evidence* of its acceptance with him.]

But David proceeds to inform us,

II. How he himself attained unto it—

For a long time he was altogether destitute of it—

^b 2 Cor. v. 21.

^c Mark the expressions, "the ungodly," "without works," Rom. iv. 5, 6.

[Partly through stoutness of heart, and partly through unbelief, he for a long time refused to humble himself for his heinous iniquities. But was he happy during that period? Hear his own representation of his state and feelings: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my roaring all the day long; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer." The state of an impenitent sinner is fitly compared to "the troubled sea, which cannot rest, but incessantly casts up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith God, to the wicked." We have a striking elucidation of this point in the history of Judas and of Peter. Both of them had sinned grievously: but Peter, through the influence of faith, repented; whilst Judas, under the influence of unbelief, sought refuge in suicide from the accusations of his own mind. Thus it is with many who are haunted with a sense of guilt, but will not abase themselves before God: they "roar all the day long;" and "howl upon their beds, like dogs; but they cry not unto God from their inmost souls^d." Hence they can find no rest, or peace; and often precipitate themselves into the torments of hell, to get rid of the torments of a guilty conscience. Ignorant people impute these acts to religion: but it is the want of religion that produces them: it is the want of true contrition that causes their guilt so to prey upon their minds. "God's hand is heavy upon them," because they will not humble themselves before him: and the longer they continue to set him at defiance, the more may they expect to feel the pressure of his righteous indignation^e — — —]

At last through penitence he attained unto it—

["He at last acknowledged his sin, and confessed his transgressions unto the Lord:" and then God, who delighteth in mercy, spoke peace unto his soul. The transition was indeed surprisingly rapid: "for he only said, I will confess my transgressions, and instantly God forgave the iniquity of his sin^f." Doubtless God saw the sincerity of his heart: he saw not only that David mourned over his past offences, but was determined through grace to give himself up in future wholly and unservedly to the Lord: and therefore he would not delay to restore to him the light of his countenance, and the joy of his salvation. We have a beautiful instance of this rich display of mercy in the parable of the Prodigal Son — — — as also in the converts on the day of Pentecost — — — and in the jailer^g — — — And similar displays of mercy may we ourselves hope for, if only we humble ourselves before him, and seek to be clothed in the Redeemer's righteousness: for "he is rich in mercy unto all who call upon him."]

^d Hos. vii. 14.

^e See Ps. xxxviii. 1—8. and cii. 3—7.

^f See 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^g Acts xvi. 34.

Having stated thus his own experience, David proceeds to tell us,

III. What improvement we should make of it—

Unspeakably encouraging is the record here given us. We should take occasion from it,

1. To seek the Lord for ourselves—

[“The godly” *will* make their prayer unto God; and the ungodly also *should* do it. If any man ever had reason to despair, David had, after having so grievously departed from his God. But he cried unto the Lord, and obtained mercy at his hands. Shall the ungodly then say, My sins are too great to be pardoned? Or shall “the godly,” after the most horrible backslidings, sit down in despair, and say, “There is no hope?” No: the example of David absolutely forbids this — — — At the same time it shews the folly of delaying repentance: for there is no peace to the soul in an impenitent state: neither here nor hereafter can we be happy in any other way than that which God has marked out for us. If penitential sorrow be painful, it never corrodes like impenitent obduracy: there is in it a melting of soul that participates of the nature of holy joy: and, if “weeping do endure for a night, joy is sure to come in the morning.” If then we would be truly happy, let us flee to Christ as the Refuge set before us: he is “the Lord our Righteousness;” and the vilest sinner upon earth shall find his “blood able to cleanse from all sin,” and his righteousness sufficient to clothe our souls, so that the “shame of our nakedness shall never appear.” But let us take care,]

2. To seek him whilst he may be found—

[There is “a time wherein he may be found” of every one of us; and a time wherein he may not be found. This is an awful truth; but it is attested by many passages of Holy Writ: “O that thou hadst known, even thou, at least *in this thy day*, the things that belong unto thy peace!” said our Lord to Jerusalem; “but now they are hid from thine eyes.” God may, and does, “give over many to a reprobate mind,” and to final impenitence: “So I gave them up.” But if you have the least desire of mercy, we are warranted to say, “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” O then improve the present hour: “Seek ye the Lord whilst he may be found; call ye upon him whilst he is near.” “If you cover your sins, you cannot prosper; but if you confess and forsake them, you shall find mercy.” “If you say that you have no sin, you deceive yourselves; but if you confess your sins, he is faithful and just to forgive you your sins, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.”]

DXLVIII.

JOY IN THE LORD INCULCATED.

Ps. xxxii. 11. *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous : and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.*

THERE is in this world, as there will also be in the eternal state, an inconceivable distance between the righteous and the wicked. The Psalmist tells us, that “ many sorrows shall be to the wicked :” and so we find it to be, from universal experience. For, where is there an ungodly man, who does not feel within him an aching void, which the world can never fill ? — — — Whose mind is not agitated with tormenting passions, which prove a source of disquiet both to himself and to those around him ? — — — Who feels not a consciousness of unpardoned guilt ; and a dread of that tribunal, before which he is shortly to appear ? — — — On the other hand, the Psalmist assures us, that “ the man who trusts in the Lord is encompassed with mercy all around :” he is happy in the favour of his God, in the subjugation of his passions, in the exercise of all holy affections, and in the prospect of everlasting felicity. Hence he adds, “ Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous : and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart !”

That we may enter into the spirit of his words, I will endeavour to set before you,

I. The character here addressed—

“ The righteous” are delineated in the Scriptures, sometimes by one peculiarity, and sometimes by another. The character here assigned them is peculiarly worthy of our consideration, because it is such as the most ungodly man upon earth must, in theory at least, approve. The whole world unites in applauding integrity, as exercised towards man : but here we shall be led to view it as exercised towards God. Now, “ the upright” man is one,

1. Whose desire after God is supreme—

[Nothing ought to stand in competition with God : we should love him with *all* our heart, and mind, and soul, and

strength. More especially should we pant after God as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, "counting all things but loss for the knowledge of him," and saying, with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"^a — — —]

2. Whose affiance in him is entire—

[No man, who has not been taught of God, can conceive how difficult it is to divest ourselves of self-righteousness and self-dependence. These evils cleave more closely to us than the flesh to our bones. When we think that we are freed from them, we shall still find the workings of them in our hearts. But the truly upright person "renounces all confidence in the flesh";^b and, like the Apostle, "desires to be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the Law, but the righteousness which is of God by faith in Christ." He considers "all fulness as treasured up in Him" for the use of his Church and people; and from His fulness he desires to receive all the supplies which he stands in need of, whether of "wisdom, or righteousness, or sanctification, or redemption."]

3. Whose devotion to him is unreserved—

[The upright has given up himself as a living sacrifice to Christ^c. He would not have any lust unmortified; nor would he retain any thing that should stand in competition with his duty. Even life itself is regarded as of no value, in comparison of Christ, and the glory of his name — — —]

Any thing less than this is hypocrisy: but to possess this character is to be "an Israelite indeed, and without guile."]

To these persons I will now address,

II. The exhortation—

To rejoice in the Lord is your high privilege. Let me, then, exhort you to rejoice in him,

1. On account of what he has already done for you—

[Here I might speak of "the sorrows" from which you are delivered, and of the mercies with which you are encompassed: but I will rather confine myself to that peculiar blessing vouchsafed to you, the being made "upright before God."]

Who amongst the children of men ever attained this character by any power of his own? No: whosoever possesses it, must say, "He that hath wrought me to the self-same

^a Phil. iii. 8. Ps. lxxiii. 25. ^b Phil. iii. 3. ^c Rom. xii. 1.

thing, is God^d.” Consider, then, how great a blessing this is — — — In comparison of it, crowns and kingdoms would be of no value. For this gift, therefore, you should bless and adore your God with your whole hearts, yea, and shout for joy with your whole souls.]

2. On account of what he has engaged to do for you—

[Would you have *stability in life*? He has promised it in his blessed word: “The righteous shall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger^e.” Would you have *peace in death*? This, also, he has engaged to give: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace^f.” Would you have *glory in eternity*? This, also, shall be your assured portion at the right hand of God^g— — —

Is not here, then, abundant cause for joy and thanksgiving? Verily, “if you hold your peace, the very stones will cry out against you.”]

3. On account of his sufficiency to fulfil all his engagements—

[Whom has Jesus ever suffered “to be plucked out of his hands?” — — — There is in him *no want of power*: “He is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” Nor is he changeable in will: for “he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.” “Of those whom the Father hath given him, he never has lost any,” nor ever will — — —]

ADDRESS,

1. To those who possess not this character, I would say, *Seek to attain it*—

[Be not satisfied with integrity towards man, but seek to have an upright heart towards God. Let there be no hypocrisy harboured within you. See to it, that your desire after God be really supreme — — — that your affiance in Christ be altogether unmingled with any measure of hope or confidence in yourselves — — — and that your devotion to him be without reserve — — — Cease not, till you have in your own hearts and consciences an evidence that you are thus given up to God: and then may you claim, at his hands, the blessings which he has promised to the upright in heart^h — — — But deceive not your own souls. Rest not in false appearances of any kind: but beg of God to make you altogether what he himself will approve.]

^d 2 Cor. v. 5.

^e Job xvii. 9.

^f Ps. xxxvii. 37.

^g Ps. xv. 1, 2. and xxiv. 3—6.

^h Ps. cxii. 2.

2. To those who possess this character, I would say,
Live in the enjoyment of your privilege—

[It is your privilege to “rejoice even with joy unspeakable and glorified.” Be not satisfied with a low and drooping state of mind. Live nigh to God: let your fellowship with him be more intimate and more abiding. It is not his will that your graces should languish, or your joys be at a low ebb. He would rather that your soul, through a sense of his presence, should be ever “shouting” for joy. See the state of the Church as drawn by the prophet Isaiahⁱ: see it as drawn by David also^k: and let your present life be, as God would have it, an earnest and a foretaste of the heavenly bliss.]

ⁱ Isai. xii. 4—6.

^k Ps. xcvi. 4—9.

DXLIX.

GOD'S CARE OF HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. xxxiii. 18—22. *Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.*

IN the Psalms of David, we do not look so much for the peculiarities of the Gospel as for general views of God's providence and grace. But let them not be undervalued on that account: for the very use of evangelical truth is so to bring us into a state of reconciliation with God, that we may have a richer and more intimate enjoyment of him in all his dispensations.

The words before us declare the interest which he takes in his peculiar people: and, in unfolding them to your view, I will endeavour to shew,

I. God's care for his people—

The manner in which our attention is called to this subject clearly shews the vast importance of it: “Behold!” behold the eye of the Lord is on them that fear him.”

Two things in particular we are here called to notice: and,

1. The description given of his people—

[Never can we sufficiently admire the goodness of God in giving to us such descriptions of his people as will enable every upright soul to discern his own character, and to number himself among them. Were they designated by such terms as would comprehend only those of higher attainments, the lower classes among them would be driven to despair. But when, as in the text, the lowest terms are used, even such as mark the very babes in Christ, every member of God's family is encouraged, and emboldened to claim the privileges to which a relationship to God entitles him. There is not in his family "a new-born babe" who does not "fear" him. All regard him as a mighty Sovereign, whom they are bound to obey. All desire to serve him, and greatly dread his displeasure. All account his favour as their supreme felicity: and desire so to approve themselves to him, that they may be accepted of him in the last day. Yet, it is not on their good dispositions that they found their hopes, and much less on their actual attainments. They are sensible of their short-comings and defects, even in their very best duties; and are conscious, that, if God were to enter into judgment with them on the footing of strict justice, they must inevitably and eternally perish. They therefore renounce, utterly, all claims upon the justice of God, and "hope altogether in his mercy," in his mercy as revealed to them in the Gospel.

"Behold," now, ye who are of a doubtful or desponding mind: Are ye not ready to leap for joy, when you find that persons of these low attainments may claim relationship to God, and assure themselves that they are interested in his paternal care? Hear, then,]

2. The particular interest which he takes in them—

["His eye is over them at all times." It is over the whole creation indeed, as we are told in the preceding context: "The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men: from the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth^a." But on his peculiar people his eye is fixed with a more especial interest; namely, "to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine;" or, in other words, to preserve them from all dangers, and to supply their every want. In relation both to their souls and bodies, they are exposed to continual and most imminent dangers. Disease or accident may at any moment consign them over to the grave. And Satan, that roaring lion, goes about seeking daily and hourly to devour their souls. On every side the world also assaults them with its temptations, whilst their own

^a ver. 13, 14.

inbred corruptions are ever watching for an opportunity to betray them into the hands of their great Adversary. But God's eye is ever over them, to counteract the devices of their enemies, and to uphold them in his everlasting arms. Not one of them will he ever suffer to "be plucked out of his hands." Their wants too, whether temporal or spiritual, he will supply. He may suffer them to be reduced to great straits, even as Israel were, when they had come out of Egypt. But sooner shall manna be given them from the clouds, and water from the rock, than they be left to perish: for his express promise to them is, that provision shall accompany his protection; and that, whilst "their place of defence is the munition of rocks, bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure^b." "Whilst they seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all needful things, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature, shall surely be added unto them^c."

But, before you take to yourselves the full comfort of these declarations, it will be proper for me yet further to shew,

II. What should be your feelings towards him—

The truly upright, even of the lowest class, can say, with David, "Our soul waiteth for the Lord." If you are indeed of the number of his people, then are you waiting for him,

1. In a way of humble affiance—

[The language of your heart is, "He is *our* help and *our* shield." But is it thus indeed? Are you going to him from day to day, as sinners who stand in need of mercy? and are you crying to him continually for "grace to help you in every time of need?" I do not ask whether you are free from assaults; but, whether they drive you to him for aid? It is supposed that you have enemies to conflict with, and trials to sustain: else you would not need to be looking out for a shield to protect, or for help to succour, you. But do you so realize the watchful care of God, as to renounce all hope in the creature, and to rely on him alone? If you truly "fear him," and truly "hope in his mercy," you cannot but make him your refuge, and commit to him your every care.]

2. In a way of confident expectation—

[The Psalmist, having such a Protector and such a Helper, anticipates a successful issue to all his trials; and declares, that the very trust which he reposes in God is at once the *ground* and *measure* of his expectations from God: "Our heart shall

^b Isai. xxxiii. 16.

^c Matt. vi. 33.

rejoice in him, *because* we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, *according as* we hope in thee." And shall this be thought too bold an assertion? It is not more bold than true: for God has repeatedly pledged his word, that "none of them that trust in him shall be desolate^d." Nay more, on every occasion we may consider him as saying to us, "According to your faith it shall be unto you^e." His conduct towards Abraham clearly shews us how he will act towards all who believe in him. Abraham is tried as never man was: he is bidden to offer up in sacrifice his only son Isaac, in and through whom all the promises of God were to be fulfilled. The holy man proceeds to execute the divine command, assured, that though Isaac were already reduced to ashes on an altar, God both could, and would, raise him up again, and fulfil in him all that he had promised. Accordingly, Isaac was given him, as it were, from the dead; and was made the instrument of raising up to Abraham that "seed, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed." So, in proportion as our expectations are enlarged, shall be God's exertions in our favour. If only we can say with David, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation: He only is my rock, and my salvation, and defence;" we may, with assured confidence, add with him, "I shall not be moved^f."]

And now let me ASK,

1. What evidence have you that you are the Lord's?

[Do you answer to the character here given of his people, "fearing him" above all, and "hoping in his mercy" alone? Do you evince that that is indeed your character, by waiting upon him continually, and expecting at his hands his proffered benefits? Examine well the habit of your minds from day to day: for it is of such only that it can be said, His eye is "over them for good^g." But far different is the state of those who fear him not: for "the face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth^h." I again say, and rejoice to say, that, though your attainments reach no further than holy fear and humble hope, the Lord will look upon you with tender and paternal love: but, if these graces be not rooted in your hearts, you have yet to learn what it is to receive the grace of God in truth.]

2. What would be your state, if God's mercy to you should be measured by your regards for him?

[St. John prayed for Gaius, that "his bodily health might prosper as his soul prosperedⁱ." And are you prepared to

^d Ps. xxxiv. 22.

^e Matt. viii. 13. and ix. 29.

^f Ps. lxii. 1, 2, 5, 6.

^g Deut. xxx. 9.

^h Ps. xxxiv. 15, 16.

ⁱ 3 John, ver. 2.

pray with David, "Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon me, according as my hope is in thee?" Verily, were this God's rule of acting towards us all, the greater part of us would never taste of his mercy to all eternity. But, thanks be to God! he is sovereign in the exercise of his mercy, being "found oftentimes of them that sought him not, and made known to them that inquired not after him." Yet let us not presume on this: for, if he shew mercy to any, he will assuredly bring them to the state described in our text, and both put his "fear in their hearts," and "make them to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost."]

DL.

DEVOTION EXEMPLIFIED.

Ps. xxxiv. 2, 3. *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.*

A SENSE of gratitude to God for his mercies will ever abide in some measure on the soul of a true believer. But there are special occasions whereon he is so impressed with the Divine goodness, that he feels as if he never could forget it, and as if he would have the whole creation join with him in his devout acknowledgments. This was the frame of David's mind, when, by feigning himself mad, he had escaped out of the hands of Achish, who would probably have put him to death, or delivered him into the hands of Saul, his blood-thirsty persecutor^a.

In discoursing on his words, we shall notice,

I. His determination to praise God—

Ungodly men love to boast of themselves—

[There is no man who has not some imaginary excellencies whereof to boast. If we possess any natural endowment either of mind or body, we are forward to bring it into notice, and to arrogate something to ourselves on account of it. One values herself upon her beauty; another boasts of his strength or courage; another prides himself in his wit, his penetration, or his judgment. Rather than pass unnoticed, the ungodly will boast of their iniquities and excesses; yea, (strange to say!) of iniquities they have not committed, and of excesses to which they have never arrived.]

^a Compare 1 Sam. xxi. 10. to xxii. 1. with the title of this psalm.

The godly, on the other hand, “make their boast in the Lord”—

[They know, by bitter experience, that in themselves dwelleth no good thing, yea, nothing but what furnishes matter for the deepest humiliation. But they see in God sufficient to excite their devoutest adoration. Whether they contemplate the perfections of his nature, or the works of his hands, the wonders of his providence, or the riches of his grace, they are filled with wonder and astonishment; and, pouring contempt on all created excellencies, they exclaim, “O God! who is like unto thee^b?” “Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ^c!”]

The Psalmist was the more induced to praise God in a public manner, from a consideration of

II. The effect he hoped to produce by this means—

He did not expect any particular benefit to accrue to the proud—

[The proud, alas! are disgusted with even the mention of God's name, provided it be with reverence and love: nor do they ever speak of him themselves, unless it be to profane his name in oaths and curses. Their aversion to hear of him increases according to the degree in which he is honoured. They will suffer us to speak somewhat of God as he is manifested in *creation*; but they do not like to be told of his love in *redemption*. They will bear to hear a little of God (though but little) in his works of *providence*; but they cannot endure to hear one syllable of his gloriously rich and sovereign *grace*. If we utter but a word expressive of admiration and love on account of his condescension in revealing himself to our souls, we forfeit at once all title to respectability, and become in their eyes the most contemptible of beings. They would be less offended with oaths and blasphemies and the grossest obscenity, than with one such an expression of love to God.]

But he hoped that to the humble his adorations would afford matter of unfeigned joy—

[The godly are not so free from pride, but that flattery sometimes finds access to their hearts, and proves a gratification to their unwary minds. But in their better seasons, when their airy dreams have vanished, and they obtain juster views of themselves, they most unfeignedly lothe and abhor themselves, and desire that God alone should be exalted. To be told of their own goodness is nauseous and unpalatable: but to hear the praises of their God and Saviour, this is delightful to their

^b Deut. xxxii. 31. Exod. xv. 11. Mic. vii. 18. ^c 2 Cor. ii. 14.

souls. It is this that endears to them the ministers of God: he who with the clearest evidence and richest unction exhibits to their view the glory and excellency of their God, will be regarded as their best friend: and every one who in sincerity labours to fulfil this office, will be “esteemed by them very highly in love for his work’s sake.”]

To stir up within ourselves a similar disposition, let us consider,

III. His exhortation to co-operate with him in this blessed design—

He calls on all of us to unite with him in praising and adoring God: and his exhortation may well serve as an

APPLICATION to the foregoing subject. We ask then,

1. Is it not a *reasonable* employment?

[Let any one call to mind the excellencies of God as they are described in Scripture, and then say whether it is not reasonable that we should exalt his name. But more particularly, let the wonders of redemption be surveyed (O wonders inexpressible, and surpassing all comprehension!); let the thought of God’s co-equal, co-eternal Son, becoming man, of his dying upon the cross, of his living again to make intercession for us in heaven; let the thought of this being done to deliver our souls from death, and to restore us to the favour of our offended Father; let this, I say, dwell upon the mind, and we shall see at once the reasonableness of this duty, and the utter unreasonableness of passing one day or one hour without renewed expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving.]

2. Is it not a *delightful* employment?

[Poor indeed is the mirth of this world, when compared with the joy of praising God. This is the work of all the glorified saints and angels: “they rest not day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God of Hosts!”

And if this be the employment of heaven, what must such an exercise be to us, but a heaven upon earth? It is indeed a foretaste of heaven, as all who have ever engaged in it are constrained to acknowledge: nor, if we were always thus engaged, would any trouble or sorrow be able to molest us: our very afflictions would rather give energy to our souls, and enlarge at once our subjects of praise, and our disposition to abound in it.]

3. Is it not a *necessary* employment?

[It is grievous on such a subject as this to insinuate any thing of an alarming nature: but, if men will not be

“constrained by love,” we must endeavour to “persuade them by the terrors of the Lord.”

God declared to his people of old, that, if they would not serve him with joyfulness and gladness of heart for the abundance of all things which he had so liberally bestowed upon them, they should endure all the curses denounced in his law^d. With how much greater force does this threatening come to us, if we neglect to praise him for the infinitely greater benefits he has conferred on us! We ourselves feel indignant if great and acknowledged virtues be despised, or eminent favours be disregarded. And shall God ever look with complacency on those who are blind to his excellencies, and insensible of his mercies? Whatever we may imagine to the contrary, none shall ever join the choir above, whose hearts have not been tuned to sing God’s praise below.]

^d Deut. xxviii. 45, 47.

DLI.

GRATEFUL RECOLLECTIONS.

Ps. xxxiv. 6. *This poor man cried; and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.*

IT is of great advantage to have transmitted to us the experience of God’s saints; because in them we see exhibited, as it were, before our eyes, what we ourselves are authorized to expect. David, in this psalm, records his deliverance from the hands of Achish, king of Gath; who, there was every reason to fear, would have either put him to death or delivered him into the hands of Saul, if God had not mercifully interposed to prevent it. As for the means which David had recourse to, in order to deceive Achish, I am not prepared either to justify or condemn them^a. To feign himself mad before Achish, was doubtless a very humiliating measure. But, whether it was strictly correct or not, God was pleased to make use of it for the deliverance of his faithful servant from the danger to which, by fleeing to Gath, he had exposed himself: and David, in this psalm, commemorates this gracious interposition, and records it for the benefit of the Church in all future ages.

Let us consider the text,

^a 1 Sam. xxi. 13—15.

I. As a grateful acknowledgment—

It is not necessary to confine our attention to the *immediate* occasion of the words, since David uses nearly the same expression in reference to mercies received during the rebellion of Absalom^b.

Throughout the whole of his life, David received marvellous mercies at the hands of God—

[His *temporal* deliverances were great on numberless occasions, from the persecutions of Saul — — — the assaults of enemies — — — and the rebellion of Absalom — — — but from all his troubles God had saved him; and for this salvation he did well to offer to God his most grateful acknowledgments^c.

But what shall I say of the *spiritual* mercies vouchsafed to him? These were beyond measure great, inasmuch as *his terrors* were sometimes of the most overwhelming nature^d — — — and *his sins*, of almost unparalleled enormity^e — — — But from all of these had God delivered him, in answer to his prayers; and for these merciful interpositions he most humbly and most thankfully adores his God^f — — —]

And have not we also innumerable mercies, both temporal and spiritual, to acknowledge?

[True in respect of temporal afflictions, none of us can bear any comparison with him. But still there are few of us who have not experienced some deliverances; and not one who has not reason to bless God, with all possible ardour, for his forbearance, at least, if not also for his pardoning love. Let us call to mind the various interpositions of our God in times of sickness, or trouble, or danger. But more especially, if ever we have cried to God under a sense of our sins, and an apprehension of God's wrath, and have obtained mercy at his hands, what thanks should not we also render to him for such marvellous mercies! Methinks if we do not call upon all that is within us to bless his holy name, "the very stones will cry out against us."]

But David intended these words to be considered, also,

II. As an instructive record—

The whole preceding part of the psalm shews that it was written by him with this view. "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall be continually

^b Ps. iii. 3, 4. with the title of that Psalm.

^c 2 Sam. xxii. 1—7.

^d Ps. vi. 1—6. and xl. 12. and xlii. 7.

^e Ps. xxv. 11.

^f Ps. xl. 1—3.

in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: *the humble shall hear thereof and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together!* I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears." Yes, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles^g." Behold, then, how plainly it instructs us,

1. That there are no troubles so great, but God is *able* to deliver us from them—

[Neither our temporal nor our spiritual troubles can well exceed those of David: yet, if he was saved from *his*, why may not we from ours? "Is God's ear become heavy, that it cannot hear; or is his hand shortened, that he cannot save^h?" We must on no account limit either the power or the mercy of our God: but "be strong in faith, giving glory to his nameⁱ"— — —]

2. That there are no troubles so great but God *will* deliver us from them, in answer to our prayers—

[Who ever heard of any instance wherein God said to a man, "Seek my face in vain?" Jonah was heard from the bottom of the sea; and David, as it were, from the very gates of hell. Manasseh, too, was heard, and accepted, after all his great and aggravated crimes^k. Let none, then, despond, whatever be his trouble, or whatever his guilt: but let all be assured, that if their faith be only as a grain of mustard-seed, it shall prevail, to the casting of all the mountains, whether of difficulty, or of sin, into the very depths of the sea^l— — —]

3. That answers to prayer, so far from puffing up a man with pride, will invariably humble and abase him—

[Who is it that here designates himself by this humiliating appellation, "This poor man?" It is David, "the man after God's own heart." But did not God's mercies to him puff him up? Quite the reverse. He never was more humble than when most honoured of his God. And so it was with Jacob in the Old Testament^m; and with the Apostle Paul in the New. If ever there was a man more highly honoured than others, it was the Apostle Paul: yet he still continued to account himself "less than the least of all saintsⁿ," yea, and

^g ver. 1—6.

^h Isai. lix. 1.

ⁱ Rom. iv. 20.

^k 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13.

^l Matt. xvii. 20.

^m Gen. xxxii. 10, 11.

ⁿ Eph. iii. 8.

as "the very chief of sinners^o." And so will divine grace operate on us also. People imagine, that if we profess to have received special answers to prayer, and to have obtained the forgiveness of our sins, we must, of necessity, be elated with pride. But the very reverse of this was the effect produced on the minds of Job, and of the prophet Isaiah, who only loathed themselves the more in proportion as they were honoured of their God^p: and thus it will be with every real saint: he will account himself "poor" even to his dying hour, and will be ever ready to "prefer others in honour before himself^q."

If, then, this retrospective view of God's mercies be so sweet on earth,

1. What must it be, the very instant we arrive at the gates of heaven!

[At the moment of our departure from the body, we shall have a complete view of all God's dealings with us, whether in his providence or grace. And if *here* our partial views of these things fill us with such joy and gratitude, what will a full discovery of them do? As to any undue elevation of mind, on account of the mercies vouchsafed to us, it will produce a directly contrary effect: for all the glorified saints cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet, and prostrate themselves before him, and sound no other name than his^r. And there they will have their salvation altogether complete. No further "trouble" to all eternity will they experience; for "all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes for ever^s." Oh! look forward to that day with holy delight: and let the foretastes of it, which you here enjoy, stimulate your exertions to honour God, and to obtain a meetness for the blessedness that awaits you.]

2. How earnest should you be in commending to others the Saviour you have found!

[The Psalmist sets you the example: "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul. I cried unto him with my mouth, and he was extolled with my tongue. Verily, God hath heard me, and hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me^t!" Thus, then, do ye also. Be not content to go to heaven alone. Tell to those around you the efficacy of prayer; and extol the Saviour, as "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto

^o 1 Tim. i. 15.

^q Rom. xii. 10. Phil. ii. 3.

^s Rev. vii. 14—17.

^p Job xlii. 5, 6. and Isai. vi. 5.

^r Rev. v. 8—10.

^t Ps. lxvi. 16—20.

God by him." Thus will you fulfil the design of David in transmitting his experience to future ages; whilst you confirm his testimony, by your acknowledgment that God is still as gracious as ever, and an unchangeable Friend to all who come to him in his Son's name.]

DLII.

EXPERIMENTAL RELIGION ENFORCED.

Ps. xxxiv. 8. *O taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

THERE is, in the minds of many, a prejudice against experimental religion, insomuch that the very name of Christian experience is an object of reproach. But, what is repentance, but a sense of sorrow on account of sin? And what is faith, but a resting of the soul on God's promised mercy in Christ? And what is love, but a going forth of the soul in kindly affections towards God and man? The heart is the proper seat of religion: "My son," says God, "give me thine heart:" and, to imagine that we can have hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, excited in the soul, and yet not possess any consciousness of such feelings, is a mere delusion. I mean not to decry those exercises of the mind which are purely intellectual; for they are necessary in their place. But it is not in them that piety consists: they may lay the foundation for piety; but there must be a superstructure of holy affections, before the edifice of religion can be complete.

This is intimated in the words before us: in which it will be proper to notice,

I. The experience recommended—

"That the Lord is good," will admit of no doubt—

[This is seen throughout all the works of Creation; every one of which bears the stamp and character of wisdom and love — — — Nor is it less visible in the dispensations of Providence: for, though we see them very partially, and are constrained to wait the issue of events in order to form a correct judgment respecting them, yet, from what we have seen, who can but acknowledge that "God is good to all, and that his tender mercy is over all his works?" — — — But most of all

does his goodness appear in the great mystery of redemption. Who can reflect on that stupendous act of mercy, the giving of his only-begotten Son to die for us, and to bear our sins in his own body on the tree? Who can reflect on the sending of his Holy Spirit to instruct and sanctify us, and on the providing for his people an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and never-fading, reserved for them in heaven? Who, I say, can take ever so slight a survey of these wonders, and not say with the Psalmist, "O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men"^a! — — —]

Let us, then, "taste and see how good the Lord is"—

[A man who had been immured all his days in a dungeon would have no conception of the radiance of the sun, in comparison of that which he would acquire by being subjected to the action of its meridian rays: nor will a person who has merely heard and read of God's goodness be able to form an estimate of it, in comparison of what he would after having had "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost." In the one state he might say, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;" but, on his transition from it, he might add, "Now mine eye seeth thee." This is what I would wish respecting you: I would wish all "the goodness of God to pass before you," if not in visible splendour and in audible sounds, yet in a way perceptible to the organs of faith.

But how is this to be attained? I answer, As Moses was put into the clift of the rock, that he might be capable of sustaining the manifestations of God's glory^b, so you must "be found in Christ;" and then you shall behold all "the glory of God shining forth in his face."]

That we may be stirred up to seek this experience, let us notice,

II. The blessedness resulting from it—

A just view of God's goodness will lead us to trust in him—

["They that know thy name," says David, "will put their trust in thee." They will go to him with all their guilt to be pardoned, and all their corruptions to be mortified, and all their wants to be supplied. Those who know him not, are ever prone to limit either his power or his willingness to save: but those who have "tasted how gracious he is"^c, will commit

^a Ps. xxxi. 19.

^b Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19.

^c 1 Pet. ii. 3.

to him their every concern, and trust him for body and for soul, for time and for eternity — — —]

And need I ask, whether persons so doing shall be “blessed?”

[Verily it is not in the power of language to declare the full extent of their blessedness. What tranquillity possesses their minds! It is well said, that “their peace passeth understanding,” and their “joy is unspeakable and glorified.” Conscious as they are of their ill desert, they nevertheless feel assured of mercy through the blood of sprinkling. Sensible as they are of a “body of sin and death,” and almost sinking under its weight, they yet can say, “Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” Knowing by bitter experience, also, the power and subtlety of Satan, they yet anticipate a final victory over him, and doubt not but that he shall soon be for ever “bruised under their feet.” As for death, they have learned to number it amongst their treasures^d: and they look forward to a habitation infinitely better than any that this world can afford, even to “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

In every view that can be conceived, these persons are blessed; as indeed the whole Scripture testifies: but more especially does David assure us of it, when, in a solemn appeal to God himself, he says, “O Lord God of Hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee^e.”]

ADDRESS—

Are there any amongst you who doubt the blessedness of religion?

[Sure I am, that you can never have had any just experience of it. And what would you yourselves say to any one who should presume, under such circumstances, to judge of earthly things? Would you not reply, you are incompetent to judge? So, then, I say to you, Go first and *taste* whether God be not good to them that seek him. If you can truly say, that you have sought him with deep penitential sorrow, and he has shut up his bowels of compassion from you; that you have prostrated yourselves at the foot of the cross, and the Lord Jesus has spurned you from his foot-stool; and that you have truly and unreservedly given yourselves up to God, and he has denied you the assistance of his grace; if you will say, that, whilst you have thus turned with your whole heart to God, and retained no allowed sin within you, God has cast out your prayer, and refused to be gracious unto you; I will allow you to be judges in this matter. But where is the man that will

^d 1 Cor. iii. 22.

^e Ps. lxxxiv. 12.

dare to stand up and say to the Lord Jesus Christ, 'Thou hast declared that thou wouldst "on no account cast out any who came to thee;" but thou hast falsified thy word in reference to me, and suffered me to seek thy face in vain?' No: there never yet existed an occasion for such a reproach, nor ever shall, as long as the world shall stand. I say, then, that those who doubt the blessedness of true religion are in darkness even to this very hour, and "speak evil of the things which they understand not." And, if they pretend that they have endeavoured to taste whether God were good, and found him not to be so, I hesitate not to say, that the fault has not been in God, but in themselves, in that their taste has been vitiated, and their souls rendered incapable of spiritual discernment.]

To those who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious,"

[I would say, Be not satisfied with a taste. God invites you to "eat and drink abundantly^f," till you are even "satisfied with his goodness^g." Such is your privilege, as David has declared: "How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore shall the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings: they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures^h."

And be careful that you do not become "weary of the Lord." We read of some, who, having "*tasted* of the heavenly gift, and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and having *tasted* the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, yet so fell away, as never to be renewed unto repentanceⁱ." Beware, lest that ever become your state. Beware, lest ye so "crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." If men who have never tasted of his grace commit iniquity, they bring no particular disgrace upon religion: but if you, who profess godliness, offend, you cast a stumbling-block before the whole world; who conclude, from what they see in you, that there is not a sufficiency of love in Christ to make you happy, or of grace to make you holy. I pray you, bring not such dishonour upon him, or such guilt upon your own souls: but so "acquaint yourselves with him, that you may be at peace;" and so delight yourselves in him, that "your souls may be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, whilst you are praising him with joyful lips^k."]

^f Cant. v. 1.

^g Jer. xxxi. 14.

^h Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8.

ⁱ Heb. vi. 6.

^k Ps. lxiii. 5.

DLIII.

THE FEAR OF GOD INCULCATED.

Ps. xxxiv. 11—16. *Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good: seek peace, and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

TO enlighten a dark world, and to guide wanderers into the paths of peace and holiness, is the most glorious office that can be committed to a human being. So at least David thought: for though he was well qualified to teach men the science of music (in which he eminently excelled), or the art of war (in which he was a great proficient), or the principles by which states and kingdoms should be governed, he considered none of those employments comparable to that of instructing men in the principles and practice of true religion. As a prophet of the Lord, (for at the time the psalm was written he was not yet exalted to the throne of Israel,) he regarded all, to whom he had access, as his children; and was anxious, as a loving parent, to gain their attention, that he might instil into their minds those truths which he himself felt to be of supreme importance. He wished in particular to shew them, what we also are desirous to point out to you,

I. Wherein the fear of the Lord consists—

The fear of the Lord is such a reverential regard to him as inclines us to walk in all things according to his revealed will, and to approve ourselves to him,

1. In our words—

[“ Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak;” and every evil that is in the heart will betray itself by the tongue. Truly the tongue is justly called an unruly member: like a helm of a ship, it is but a small matter; but it boasteth great things. It is declared by God himself to be “ a world of iniquity;” “ a fire, setting in flames the course of nature, and itself set on fire of hell.” So untameable is it, that the man who bridles it on all occasions is pronounced to be “ a perfect man:” whilst, on the other hand, the man who has no

command over it, however religious he may fancy himself, or be thought by others, is a self-deceiver, whose religion is vain^a. It is therefore with great propriety that David specifies the control of the tongue as the first evidence of the fear of God; "Whoso desireth life, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking guile." Not only must all profane speeches and all impure communications be forborne, but every thing that is false and deceitful, or corrupt in any way whatever. Every proud, angry, passionate, revengeful word must be suppressed, whatever may be the provocation to utter it: all calumny, detraction, uncharitableness, tale-bearing, must be avoided, and "the law of truth and of kindness be continually in the lips." God has said, that "of every idle word we must give account in the day of judgment," and that "by our words we shall be either justified or condemned;" and therefore the fear of the Lord must of necessity cause us to "take heed to our ways, that we sin not with our tongue."]

2. In our actions—

[Sin is "that abominable thing which God hates:" and it should be universally and irreconcilably hated by us: "We must depart from evil, and do good." Whatever evil we may have been most tempted, and most accustomed, to commit, that is the evil against which we must most watchfully guard, and from which we must most resolutely depart — — — On the other hand, we must be occupied in doing good. The doing of good should be the great business of life: first, the doing good to our own household; then to all our neighbours; then to the Church of God at large. The devising of good, and the executing of good, and the uniting with others in the good devised by them, and the stirring up all around us to do good according to their opportunities and ability; *this* is a life worthy of a Christian, and necessarily flowing from the fear of God. If we truly fear God, we shall "abhor that which is evil, and cleave (be glued) to that which is good," and "be fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."]

3. In our whole spirit and temper—

[A peaceful, loving spirit will characterize every child of God. "God is love;" and all his children will resemble him in this glorious attribute. True it is, that it is not always *possible* to be at peace, because some are so wicked and unreasonable that they will take occasion even from our very peacefulness to injure us the more. Hence St. Paul says, "*If it be possible*, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Whether we succeed or not, our constant aim and effort

^a See Jam. iii. 2—8.

must be for peace. For the preservation of it we should account no sacrifice too great: and we should be as studious to promote it amongst others, as to preserve it with ourselves. If we see an unkind spirit prevailing any where, we should endeavour to extinguish the fire, and not, by countenancing it, add fuel to the flame. The evil of contention is so great, that no one who possesses heavenly wisdom will engage in it himself, or encourage it in others^b. If we fear the Lord indeed, our constant labour will be to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”]

Whilst explaining thus wherein the fear of the Lord consists, the Psalmist points out,

II. The importance of cultivating it in our own hearts—

As for those who had no concern about their souls, he did not expect them to hearken to such self-denying lessons as he endeavoured to inculcate: but to those who desired true happiness in this world and the next, he gave the advice which we have already considered^c. To enforce his advice, he assured them of,

1. God's favour to them that fear him—

[“The eyes of the Lord,” says he, “are upon the righteous, and his ear is open to their cry.” Not a moment are they out of his sight, nor for a moment is he inattentive to their prayers. Are they in danger? He will protect them, and cause his angel to encamp around them, that no enemy may approach to hurt them^d— — — Are they in want? He will supply them with all that is needful for them. “The lions that could prey upon them shall want and suffer hunger; but *they* shall want no manner of thing that is good,” for body or for soul, for time or for eternity^e— — — Are they in trouble? He will assuredly in due time interpose to deliver them. They may have many troubles: but he will deliver them from all, the very instant they have accomplished their destined office^f. He sends the trials to purify them from their dross: and he sits by the furnace, ready to bring them out, in the proper season, “purified as gold.” Are they longing for his presence here, and his glory hereafter? He will “be nigh unto their souls” in this world, and will save them in the Lord Jesus Christ with an everlasting salvation in the world to come^g. In a word, there shall be an infinite distance between them and others: for they shall enjoy

^b Jam. iii. 13—18.

^c ver. 12.

^d ver. 7.

^e ver. 9, 10.

^f ver. 17, 19.

^g ver. 18.

all the richest blessings of redemption, whilst those who cast off the fear of God shall be left inconsolably and for ever desolate^h. What inducements are here to seek that holy disposition of mind inculcated in our text!]

2. His indignation against those who fear him not—

[God does not merely withhold his blessings from these persons, but actually becomes their enemy: he does not only *turn his face from* them, but *sets his face against* them: “he walks contrary to them who thus walk contrary to him.” Hear how indignantly he speaks to those who profess to reverence him, but in fact dishonour him by their conduct: “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I sayⁱ?” Yea, he declares that whatever profession of religion they may make, they shall never enter into his kingdom: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven^k.” He intimates, that in the day of judgment there will be many who will confidently claim heaven, as it were, on account of their zeal and success in his service: but that, forasmuch as they were destitute of all these holy dispositions, he will not acknowledge them as his, but bid them to depart accursed into everlasting fire^l. In a word, he declares that by their fruits only shall they be known either in this world or the next^m.

It must however be remembered, that though the exercise of these holy dispositions is pleasing and acceptable to God, it is not meritorious in itself; nor can it found a claim for our justification before God. A reward, it is true, will be given us; but it is “a reward of grace, and not of debt.” It is in Christ only that we can have a justifying righteousness; nevertheless our works will be regarded as the evidences of our faith: if our faith operate in the way above mentioned, we shall be acknowledged as Christ’s redeemed people; but if it do not, it will be considered as dead; and we shall be cast out as hypocrites and self-deceivers.]

Suffer now a word of EXHORTATION. Two things we entreat of you;

1. To labour for practical religion—

[There are many professors of religion who love to hear of the privileges of the Lord’s people, but not to hear of their duties; and they call such subjects as the foregoing, *legal*: but they who do so, understand neither what legality is, nor what the Gospel is. *Legality* is a leaning, either in whole or in part, to the works of the law to justify us before God: and if we

^h ver. 21, 22.

ⁱ Luke vi. 46.

^k Matt. vii. 21.

^l Matt. vii. 22, 23.

^m Matt. vii. 18—20.

encouraged that, we might justly be regarded as abandoning and subverting the Gospel of Christ. But, when we teach persons to fear the Lord, and, from a desire of his favour in Christ, and from a dread of his displeasure, to approve themselves to God in the whole of their life and conversation, we do only what the Apostles of our Lord also did: for St. Peter quotes the very words of our text in the precise way in which we have insisted upon themⁿ: and therefore we are sure that an attention to them becomes us under the Gospel. We further say, that the people who set themselves up for judges in this way, are ignorant also of the Gospel. The Gospel consists of two parts, doctrine and practice, just as a house consists of a foundation and a superstructure. But who would choose a place for his habitation that has a foundation indeed, but neither walls nor roof? or who would call such a structure *a house*? So doctrines, however sound, will not answer the ends of the Gospel, nor can they be properly called the Gospel, unless they stand connected with good works as issuing from them and built upon them. The doctrines are the foundation; the good works are the superstructure: and then only are the doctrines available for our salvation, when they operate to the production of universal holiness. This is the account which our blessed Lord himself gives of his Gospel: and he alone is truly wise, who embraces and builds upon it in this view^o.]

2. To cultivate a child-like spirit—

[We have addressed you as “children:” though there may be many present who are “young men and fathers,” yet must we say, that an advance towards Christian perfection will always be manifested by a proportionate growth in humility. Our blessed Lord told his Apostles, that whoever amongst them most fully attained the tempers and dispositions of a “little child, the same would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Let your growth then be seen in this way: then, whatever be taught you, it will be “received with meekness, as an engrafted word, able and effectual to save your souls.” Indeed without this disposition of mind no man can have that “honest and good heart,” which alone will nourish the seed that is sown in it, and enable it to “bring forth fruit unto perfection.”

To those who are really but young in age, a teachable spirit is indispensable to their improvement. O let such listen to the voice of their teachers with humility and gratitude! let them especially also look unto the Holy Spirit of God, to apply the word unto their hearts: and let them “not be hearers only of the Gospel, but doers of it also,” lest the privileges they enjoy lead only to the deceiving and ruining of their own souls.]

ⁿ 1 Pet. iii. 10—12. ^o Matt. vii. 24—27.

DLIV.

THE BROKEN AND CONTRITE IN HEART ENCOURAGED.

Ps. xxxiv. 18. *The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.*

THE objects of God's favour are very frequently designated by the exalted title of "The righteous:" "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous:" "Many are the afflictions of the righteous:" "They that hate the righteous shall be desolate^a." But, a person of an humble spirit finds it difficult to assume to himself this character, because of the innumerable imperfections of which he is conscious; and, consequently, he is backward to claim the promises assigned to it. But the terms whereby the Lord's people are characterized in our text are such as the most humble may appropriate to themselves without vanity: and whatever is promised to them under that character, they may regard as their legitimate and assured portion.

The words before us will naturally lead me to shew,

I. What is that spirit which the Lord approves—

There is a brokenness of heart which God does not approve, because it proceeds altogether from worldly sorrow^b: but that which is associated with contrition is truly pleasing in his sight.

Let us more distinctly see what the spirit here designated is—

[It is called "a broken heart, and a contrite spirit." It is founded altogether in a sense of sin, and in a consciousness of deserving God's wrath on account of sin. It is, however, no light sense of sin, but such an one as David had, when he said, "Mine iniquities are gone over my head: as a heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me^c:" "Mine iniquities have taken such hold upon me, that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me^d." Nor is it merely on account of the penalty annexed to transgression that they are so oppressed, but on account of its hateful nature, as defiling and debasing their souls. Hence they "lothe themselves," as vile, and base, and filthy, and

^a ver. xv. 19, 21.

^c Ps. xxxviii. 4.

^b Prov. xv. 13.

^d Ps. xl. 12.

abominable^e: yea, to their dying hour do they retain this humiliating sense of their own corruptions, notwithstanding they have a hope that God is pacified towards them; and even the more on account of that very mercy which they have experienced at his hands^f.

Shall it be thought that such a sense of sin can become those only who have been guilty of some flagrant enormities? I answer, It befits the most moral person upon earth, no less than the most abandoned sinner. I say not that the moral and the immoral are upon a perfect level, either in the sight of God or man; for, beyond all doubt, all are hateful in proportion to the greatness and multitude of their iniquities: but there is no person so virtuous, but that he needs to be humbled before God in dust and ashes. Let any man, however virtuous, look back upon his past life, and see how far he has been from God, and how entirely he has lived to himself. Let him consider how little sense he has had of his obligations to God, especially for all the wonders of redeeming love — — — and how often he has “done despite to the Holy Spirit,” in resisting his sacred motions, and in deferring that great work which he knew to be necessary for the salvation of his soul. We quite mistake, if we think that guilt attaches only to flagrant immoralities: the living without God in the world is the summit and consummation of all guilt: and where is the man who must not plead guilty to that charge? I suppose that no one will be found to arrogate to himself a higher character than that of Job, who, according to the testimony of God himself, was “a perfect and upright man:” yet did even Job, when led into just views of himself, exclaim, “Behold, I am vile!” “I repent therefore, and abhor myself in dust and ashes^g.”]

This is the spirit which God approves—

[This, how unamiable soever it may appear in the eyes of men, is most pleasing in the sight of God. And well it may be so: for *it honours God's Law*. The man who is not thus abased before God, declares, in effect, that there is no great evil in disregarding God's Law, and that there is no occasion for those who have transgressed it to be ashamed. But the truly contrite person who lothes himself for his iniquities, acknowledges that “the Law is holy, and just, and good,” and that every transgression of it is a just ground for the deepest humiliation.

Moreover, the contrition here spoken of *justifies God's denunciations against sin*. The unhumbled sinner says, in effect, God will not execute judgment: nor have I any cause to tremble for his displeasure: and if he were to consign me over to perdition on account of my sins, he would be unmerciful and unjust.

^e Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

^f Ezek. xvi. 63.

^g Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

On the contrary, the man whose heart is broken bears a very different testimony. He acknowledges that he deserves God's wrath and indignation; and that, whatever sentence the Judge shall pass upon him, he will be fully justified as not inflicting more than his iniquities have deserved^h.

Above all, the contrite person *manifests a state of mind duly prepared for the reception of the Gospel*. "What shall I do to be savedⁱ?" is his cry from day to day: and, when he finds that the Gospel makes known to him a Saviour, O! how gladly does he embrace the proffered mercy! how thankfully does he renounce all hope in himself, and put on him the unspotted robe of Christ's righteousness! The unhumiliated sinner can hear the glad tidings of salvation without feeling any deep interest in them: but the truly contrite person regards the Saviour, as the man who had accidentally slain a neighbour regarded the city of refuge: he knows that in Christ alone he can find safety; and he has no rest in his soul till he has fled for refuge to the hope set before him.

Thus, whilst the person that is "whole feels no need of the physician, the sick" and dying patient commits himself entirely to his care, and thankfully follows the regimen he prescribes. Well, therefore, may God approve of him, since he, and he alone, appreciates aright the gift of God's only dear Son to be the Saviour of the world.]

But it will be proper to inquire,

II. In what way he will testify his approbation of it—

A person bowed down with a sense of sin is ready to fear that God will never shew mercy to one so undeserving of it. But God promises, in our text, that,

1. "He will be nigh unto them that are of a broken heart"—

[God, being everywhere present, may be supposed to be as near to one person as another. And so he is, if we regard his essence. But there are manifestations of the Divine presence, which the world at large have no conception of, but which are experienced by all who follow after God in the exercise of prayer and faith. The Apostle spoke not in his own person only, but in the person of believers generally, when he said, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." We are taught to expect, that if we "draw nigh to God, he will draw nigh to us:" he will "lift up the light of his countenance upon us:" he will "shed abroad his love in our hearts:" he will enable us to cry with holy confidence, "Abba, Father;" and will "witness with our spirits that we are his."

^h Ps. li. 4.

ⁱ Acts xvi. 30.

Is any one disposed to ask, "How can these things be?" "How is it that God will manifest himself to his people, and not unto the world?" This is the very question which one of the Apostles put to our Lord; who, in reply, confirmed the truth he had asserted; saying, "If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him^k."]

2. "He will save those that be of a contrite spirit"—

[Many are their *fears* in relation to their final happiness: but "God will never suffer so much as one of his little ones to perish." The contrite in particular he will save: for "he looketh upon men; and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light^l." Their *temptations* may be many; but "He will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the temptation make also for them a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it^m." However numerous or potent their *enemies* may be, "he will deliver them out of the hands of allⁿ," and "make them more than conquerors over all^o." In a word, "He will save them with an everlasting salvation; nor shall they be ashamed or confounded world without end^p."]

But the text leads me rather to shew you,

III. What present encouragement the very existence of it affords to those in whom it is found—

The contrition which has been before described is the fruit and effect of God's love to the soul—

["The Lord *is* nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and *saveth* such as be of a contrite spirit." There is no work of divine grace more difficult than this. The taking away of the stony heart, and the giving a heart of flesh, is a new creation; and discovers as clearly the operation of Omnipotence as the universe itself. It is the very beginning of salvation in the soul. A person under a deep sense of sin is apt to imagine that God will not have mercy upon him: but his very contrition is a proof and evidence that God has already imparted to him his grace. What a reviving consideration is this to the humble penitent! God *is* nigh thee: he *is in the very act* of saving thee. Why, then, art thou cast down? Why art thou "saying, The Lord hath forsaken and forgotten me?" Does the greatness of thy guilt appal thee?

^k John xiv. 21—23.

^m 1 Cor. x. 13.

^o Rom. viii. 37.

^l Job xxxiii. 24, 27, 28.

ⁿ Luke i. 74.

^p Isai. xlv. 17.

Who shewed to thee thy sins? Who opened thine eyes? Who softened thy heart? Who disposed thee to condemn thyself, and to justify thy God? Is this thine own work, or the work of any enemy? Does not the very nature of the work itself constrain thee to say, "He that hath wrought me to this self-same thing, is God?"

It is also the earnest and foretaste of your eternal inheritance—

[Would God have done such things for thee, if he had designed ultimately to destroy thee^a? These are only as the first-fruits, which sanctified and assured the whole harvest. He has expressly told us, that the gift of his "Spirit is an earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession^r." You are aware what an *earnest* is: it is not only a pledge of future blessings, but the actual commencement of them in the soul. And, if you will survey the heavenly hosts, you will find that this very abasement of their souls before God is a striking feature in their character, and a grand constituent of their bliss. They all, with lowliest self-abasement, fall on their faces before the throne of God, whilst, with devoutest acclamations, they ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb^s. Learn, then, to view all your feelings in their proper light; so shall you "from the eater bring forth meat, and from the strong shall bring forth sweet."]

Let me not, however, CONCLUDE without addressing a few words,

1. To those in whom this spirit is not found—

[You, alas! have no part or lot in the blessedness which is prepared for the broken in heart. Look at the Pharisee and the Publican: the one was filled with self-complacency, on account of his own fancied goodness; whilst the other dared not even to lift up his eyes to heaven, on account of his own conscious unworthiness. But it was the latter, and not the former, who found acceptance with God: and in all similar characters shall the same event be realized, as long as the world shall stand. Humble yourselves, therefore, whoever ye be; for in that way only have ye any hope that God shall lift you up^t.]

2. To those who are dejected by reason of it—

[Forget not, I beseech you, for what end the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world: Was it not to bind up the broken

^a Judges xiii. 23.

^r Eph. i. 13, 14. See the whole of these assertions confirmed, Ps. xci. 14—16. and cxlv. 18, 19.

^s Rev. v. 8—10.

^t Jam. iv. 7, 8.

heart; and to give to those who "mourn in Zion, to give," I say, "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness?" And, if the greatness of your past sins appear an obstacle in your way, has he not told you, that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound^x?" Yield not, then, to desponding thoughts, nor limit the mercy of your God: but know assuredly, that he will "heal the broken in heart^y," and that all who come unto the Saviour heavy-laden with their sins shall be partakers of his promised rest^z.]

^u Isai. lxi. 1—3. and Luke iv. 18.

^x Rom. v. 20, 21.

^y Ps. cxlvii. 3.

^z Matt. xi. 28.

DLV.

THE SINNER'S HOPE.

Ps. xxxv. 3. *Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.*

SUSPENSE is extremely painful to the human mind, and the more so in proportion to the danger to which we are exposed. David experienced this in a very high degree. In the psalm before us he appears to have been greatly agitated with fear on account of the number and malignity of the enemies who sought his ruin, and were exulting in the expectation of his speedy fall. Seeing no hope for himself in the efforts of his adherents, he betook himself to prayer, and with most earnest importunity implored that help from his Creator which the creature was unable to afford. And as it was with an armed host that he was beset, he addressed the Lord under the character of a mighty warrior, to stand forth in his defence: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation."

This last petition I propose to consider,

I. As offered by him—

Nothing could exceed the bitterness of David's enemies—

[If we mark the diversified expressions in this psalm, we shall have some idea of the danger to which he was exposed. Saul having determined if possible to destroy him, his subjects of every description leagued together to execute his will. "False witnesses rose up, and laid to David's charge things which he knew not;" and, in confirmation of their accusations, declared that they were eye-witnesses of the acts imputed to him^a. Among the number of these were many on whom he had conferred the greatest obligations^b, and to whom he had given no just occasion of offence^c. "They devised deceitful matters against him^d:" "they hid a net for him, and digged a pit for his soul^e." To encourage one another in their odious work, "they winked with their eye^f;" and, when they thought they had prevailed against him, "they rejoiced in his adversity^g;" and "magnified themselves against him^h," and "said in their hearts, Ah! so would we have it: we have swallowed him upⁱ." The very abjects, encouraged by the example of their superiors, gathered themselves together against him, and tare him incessantly; whilst hypocritical mockers in their feasts, (pretending to more humanity,) yet "gnashed upon him with their teeth^k." In a word, all classes of the community lay in wait for his soul^l, and, like lions prowling for their prey, sought to destroy and to devour him^m.]

Under these circumstances he cried to God for help—

[The particular expression in our text is worthy of notice, especially as shewing what thoughts the Psalmist entertained of God. He believed *that God was able* to deliver him, how powerful soever his enemies might be. He knew, that if God was for him, "no weapon that was formed against him could prosper." Nor did he doubt *the goodness of God*, as willing to hear and answer his petitions, and to afford him the protection which he so earnestly desired. But that which chiefly demands our attention is, his persuasion of *the condescension of the Most High*, in that he prayed, nor merely for deliverance, but for such an assurance of it to his soul, as should calm all the tumult of his mind, and fill him with perfect peace.

Now this was the sure way to succeed in prayer. Nothing so secures the interposition of God in our behalf, as the magnifying of him in our hearts: "Them that honour him, he will honour." If we limit his mercies, he will limit his gifts. If we doubt his power or willingness to help, he will withhold such

^a ver. 11, 21.

^b ver. 12.

^c ver. 19.

^d ver. 20;

^e ver. 7.

^f ver. 19.

^g ver. 15.

^h ver. 26.

ⁱ ver. 26.

^k ver. 15, 16.

^l ver. 4.

^m ver. 17, 25.

displays of his mercy as he would otherwise have vouchsafedⁿ. On the other hand, if we be steadfast in believing expectations of his mercy, we shall have such discoveries of his glory as an unbelieving heart has no conception of^o. We should never forget, that there is nothing too great to ask of God. We never can “open our mouth so wide, but he will fill it^p,” nor can we ever be more enlarged in our petitions towards him, than he will be in his communications towards us^q.]

But the petition in our text is still more deserving of attention—

II. As suited to us—

Imminent as David's dangers were, they were not to be compared with those to which we are exposed—

[David's enemies might be eluded, intimidated, vanquished: but those with which the soul of every sinner is encompassed can never be eluded, never be overcome.

Sin is a deadly foe, that seeks to destroy every child of man. It lies in wait for us, to allure, to deceive, to ruin us. It clothes itself in specious array: it comes with a friendly aspect: it bids us fear no harm: it tells us, “We shall have peace, though we yield to its fascinations^r.” But it is no sooner committed, than it is registered in the book of God's remembrance, and will come forth at a future period as a swift witness against all whom it has deceived. From man it may be hidden: and even by those who have committed it, it may be forgotten: but “it hunts the wicked man to overthrow him^s,” and though it do not immediately seize the sinner as its prey, “it will be sure to find him out^t,” and, like a millstone about his neck, to sink him into everlasting perdition^u.

The law of God also follows with its curses all who have transgressed its commands^x. It is inexorable. It is a creditor that cannot be satisfied, or appeased. It will take the sinner by the throat, saying, “Pay me that thou owest:” and, when we cannot discharge our debt, “it will listen to no entreaties, but will cast us into prison, till we have paid the uttermost farthing.” God himself appealed to his people of old respecting this: “My words, and my statutes, which I commanded my servants the prophets, did they not take hold of your fathers? And they returned, and said, Like as the Lord of Hosts thought to do unto us, according to our ways, and according to our doings, so hath he dealt with us^y.” Of the

ⁿ Matt. xiii. 58.

^o John xi. 40.

^p Ps. lxxxix. 10.

^q 2 Cor. vi. 11—13.

^r Deut. xxix. 19.

^s Ps. cxl. 11.

^t Numb. xxxii. 23.

^u Jam. i. 14, 15.

^x Gal. iii. 10.

^y Zech. i. 6.

six hundred thousand men who came out of Egypt, how many entered into Canaan? None, except Joshua and Caleb; who "had followed the Lord fully." Against all the rest a sentence of death was denounced in the very first year of their sojourning in the wilderness: and at the close of the forty years a minute inquiry was instituted; and not one was found alive^z. So it will be found in the last day, that of all the threatenings in the book of God not one has fallen to the ground; and that, of all who mourned not over their transgressions of the law, not one escaped the vengeance of his God. God has said, "Their foot shall slide in due time^a:" he has declared that "they shall all be turned into hell, even all the nations that forget him^b:" that "he will rain upon them snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; and that this shall be the portion of their cup^c:" he has declared it, I say; and, whether we will believe it or not, his law shall be thus honoured, and his justice shall be thus magnified, on every impenitent transgressor: for already is he "whetting his sword for the execution of his vengeance upon them; and soon will he make his arrows drunk with their blood^d." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die^e."

There is yet another adversary, who is lying in wait for our souls, and, like a roaring lion, going about, seeking to devour us; and that is *Satan*: nor can we have any conception of the wiles and devices to which he has recourse, in order to accomplish his malignant purpose. Even in Paradise he prevailed to ensnare and ruin our first parents: and the same temptations he puts in our way, assuring us, that, in following his counsel, we shall have unqualified pleasure, and happiness without alloy. He is in Scripture compared to "a fowler^f"; and, like a fowler, he spreads his nets, and allures us by temptations suited to our appetites, and by the example of sinners whom he has already ensnared, and whom he makes use of to decoy us. We see nothing but the promised gratification; and whilst one or another invites us to participate his supposed joys, we flock to him, "without considering that it is for our life^g." Thus it is the drunkard, the whoremonger, the adulterer is ensnared: he thinks of nothing but his pleasure: but the fowler who lays the snare, foresees and prognosticates the end. Having succeeded in "taking us alive^h," he "keeps us in peaceⁱ," and does all he can to hide from us our bondage: but he knows, that they who now yield to his solicitations as a tempter, will soon experience his power as a tormentor.

Another enemy also that is confederate against us, is *death*.

^z Numb. xiv. 28, 29, 35—38.

^b Ps. ix. 17.

^c Ps. xi. 6.

^e Ezek. xviii. 4.

^f Ps. xci. 3.

^h ἐζωγραμμένοι. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

^a Deut. xxxii. 35.

^d Deut. xxxii. 41, 42.

^g Prov. vii. 23.

ⁱ Luke xi. 21.

He is waiting every moment to execute his commission against us; well knowing, that the instant he can inflict the stroke he meditates, all hope of our deliverance is at an end for ever. He has his eye steadily fixed on persons of every age and station: and the instruments he has at his command are as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore. When he comes in his more visible and gradual assaults, he contrives to hide his ultimate designs, and to divert the minds of the sufferers from the thoughts of an hereafter. As the avenger of sin he entered into the world^k: and in the same character he is daily sweeping millions from the earth, and bearing in malignant triumph his unhappy victims to the tribunal of their God.

Hell too combines with all the rest, and is opening wide its jaws to receive its destined prey. What the prophet said respecting the king of Babylon, may be said to every impenitent sinner under heaven: "Hell from beneath is moved for thee, to meet thee at thy coming^l." As in that instance "it stirred up the chief ones of the earth, and raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations" to exult over the fallen monarch, so those persons who were once our partners in sin, or whom by our example we hardened in their iniquities, will all come forth to meet us, that they may in the midst of all their own torments have the malignant pleasure of beholding and of aggravating ours. It is said, that in the last day "the angels will bind up sinners *in bundles* to burn them;" and for this end, no doubt, that they who have been associates in wickedness may, by their mutual execrations, augment each other's misery to all eternity. For this all hell is waiting. We are told indeed respecting the Rich Man, who lifting up his eyes in torments, desired that a messenger might be sent to his five surviving brethren, to "warn them, lest they also should come into the same place of torment:" but this was not from any love to them, but from self-love; knowing as he did by bitter experience, how greatly his own sufferings would be increased by the reproaches of those whom by his influence and example he had so contributed to destroy.

Know ye then, Beloved, that if David was in danger from the thousands who sought his life, so are ye ten thousand times more in danger from *sin*, which deceives you; from *the law*, which denounces its curse against you; from *Satan*, who arms against you all the hosts of hell; from *death*, that is ever waiting to cut you down: and from *hell*, that is already yawning to swallow you up.]

Say then whether David's petition be not altogether suited to *our* state?

^k Rom. v. 12.

^l Isai. xiv. 9.

[*To whom will you go for salvation, if not to the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you look to any efforts of your own? Can you ever cancel the guilt of sin? Can you ever satisfy the demands of God's law? Can you ever vanquish Satan and all the powers of darkness? Can you ever overcome death and hell, so that they shall lose all their terrors, and have no power over you? The hope of any such thing were vain: it is impossible: and if the whole world were combined to aid you, they could effect nothing. "Though hand joined in hand" throughout the globe, "no sinner in the universe could go unpunished^m." None can ever blot out one single sin, but He who made atonement for sin by the blood of his cross. None can silence the demands of God's law, but He who endured its penalties, and obeyed its precepts, in order that he might "bring in an everlasting righteousness," and "make us the righteousness of God in him." None can "bruise Satan under our feet," but He who "triumphed over him upon the cross," and in his ascension "led captivity itself captive." None can divest death and hell of their terrors, but "He who has the keys of both, and openeth so that none can shut, and shutteth so that none can open."*

Go then to him for it in David's words; "Lord, say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." Offer this petition humbly: offer it earnestly: offer it in faith — — — Never, from the foundation of the world, did he cast out one who came to him in sincerity and truth. If you plead with him in faith, all these enemies shall be subdued before you; and all your sorrows be turned into joy. See, in the prophecies of Isaiah, what your state shall then be: "In that day thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation! I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvationⁿ. Here you see that he will not only give you the deliverance you desire, but the assurance of it also, saying to your soul, "I am thy salvation." Beloved Brethren, think what blessedness you will then enjoy. See it in David: "My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God^o." He then encourages you to follow his example: "Trust in him at all times, ye people: pour out your hearts before him: God is a refuge for us^p." This is the very advice which I would give also: "Pour out your hearts before him, and trust in him."

^m Prov. xii. 21.

^o Ps. lxii. 5—7.

ⁿ Isai. xii. 1, 2.

^p Ps. lxii. 8.

For what happiness can you possess in *this world*, whilst your soul, your immortal soul, is in such imminent danger? If you were only, like David, encompassed with armed hosts that were seeking to destroy you, you would be full of alarm and terror: and can you enjoy a moment's ease, while it is doubtful whether in the space of a few days you shall not lie down in everlasting burnings? I pray you to awake from your security: and "give neither sleep to your eyes nor slumber to your eyelids," till you have a good and well-founded hope, that Jesus is your Saviour, and till you are enabled to say with Paul, "He has loved me, and given himself for me."]

DLVI.

COMPASSION TO THE SICK.

Ps. xxxv. 13, 14. *As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.*

THE precepts of Christianity appear to be so pure and exalted, that all attempt to obey them must be vain. This is particularly the case with respect to the conduct which is to be observed towards those who injure us. To forgive them, is not sufficient. We must not only forbear to avenge ourselves upon them, but must do them good, and act towards them with most unbounded benevolence: "I say unto you," says our Lord, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." But this duty is by no means impracticable: for even under the Law it was practised to an astonishing extent by David, who laboured to the uttermost, not only "not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good."

Scarcely any thing could exceed the bitterness of Saul towards his servant David: yet when David had him altogether, and as it should seem by a special intervention of Providence, in his power, he would neither hurt him himself, nor suffer him to be hurt by others: nay more, when either Saul, or any of those who joined with him in his relentless perse-

cution of an unoffending servant, were stricken with any disease by God himself, so far from rejoicing at it, or even being unconcerned about it, he laid it to heart, and set himself by fasting and prayer to obtain for them a removal, or at least a sanctified improvement of their sufferings: in a word, he felt for them as if they had been his dearest friends, or his most honoured relatives.

Whilst this conduct of David evinced the height of his attainments in relation to a forgiving spirit, it shewed how justly he estimated the condition of a man oppressed with sickness, and at the same time destitute of the consolations of religion, and unprepared to meet his God. This is a subject deserving of peculiar attention: for, in truth, it is very seldom viewed as it ought to be, even by religious characters. Slighter feelings of sympathy are common enough; but such as are described in our text are rarely experienced. To excite them in all our hearts, we shall shew,

I. How much the sick stand in need of our compassion—

Ungodly men, whether in health or sickness, are in a truly pitiable condition; for “they are walking in darkness, and ignorant whither they are going,” whilst they are on the very brink and precipice of the bottomless abyss of hell. But in sickness they are peculiar objects of our compassion: for,

They are then bereft of all that they before enjoyed—

[The pleasures of society, the sports of the field, the amusements of the theatre or the ball, and even the researches of science, have now lost their relish — — — They have neither strength nor spirits for such employments. Even the light itself, which is so cheering to those in health, is almost excluded from their chamber, because of their inability to endure its splendour.]

Nor have they any substitute to repair their loss—

[Those who were their companions in pleasure, have no taste for those things which alone would administer comfort in this trying hour. They may make from time to time their

complimentary inquiries, but they cannot sympathize with the afflicted, and, by participation, lighten their burthens. If they come to visit their friend, they have nothing to speak of but vanity, nothing that can strengthen his weak hands, or sustain his troubled mind. "Miserable comforters are they all, and physicians of no value." Nor does the sick person himself find it so easy to turn his mind to heavenly things as he once imagined. When immersed in the world, he supposed that it would be time enough to think of eternity when he should be laid aside by sickness; and he concluded that in that season he should feel no difficulty in turning his mind to heavenly contemplations: but he now finds that this is a very unfavourable season for such employment, and that pain or lassitude unfit him for them. He cannot collect his mind; he cannot fix it with any energy on things to which it has been a stranger: and the feelings of the body almost incapacitate him from attending to the concerns of the soul. Thus, however he may abound in worldly wealth and honour, he is a poor, destitute, unhappy being — — —]

But the distress of the sick is greatly aggravated, if poverty be added to all their other trials—

[A poor man in a state of health is as happy as his richer neighbours: but when he falls into sickness, his condition is very pitiable. He is unable to procure the aid which his disorders call for: yea, he cannot provide even the necessaries of life. His family, deprived of his earnings, fall into the extremest want. The little comforts which they have hitherto had for clothing by day and for rest by night, now are sold one after another to supply food for the body, or are pledged never more to be redeemed. Cold, hunger, and nakedness greatly aggravate the pressure of their disorders; and the miseries of a dependant family are an overwhelming addition to the weight already insupportable. The resources which might somewhat alleviate the sorrows of one in opulence, are wholly wanting to the poor: so that, if they have not the consolations of religion to support them in their sickness, they are objects of the deepest commiseration.]

Let us then consider,

II. What is that measure of compassion which we ought to exercise towards them—

If we consider only the temporal distress of the sick, our sympathy with them should be deep—

[It is not sufficient to express a few words of commiseration, and to send a little relief; we should feel for them as for ourselves; and bear a part of their burthens on our spirit, no

less than in our purse. It was in this way that Job exercised this amiable disposition: "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor^a?" And it is in this way that we also must fulfil the law of Christ^b — — —]

But more especially should we feel this from a regard for their souls—

[Pious as David was, we can have no doubt but that in his griefs for Saul and Doeg, he had respect to their spiritual, as well as their temporal, condition. And this accounts for the strong feelings expressed in our text. He knew in what a fearful state they would be found, if they should die impenitent: and therefore, to obtain for them, if possible, a deliverance from such a heavy judgment, he fasted, and prayed, and clothed himself with sackcloth, and pleaded with God in their behalf, just as if they had been his dearest friends or relatives. He forgot all the injuries which they had done him, and were daily heaping upon him, from a persuasion that they did infinitely greater injury to their own souls, than it was possible for them to do to him. The thought of the danger in which they were of perishing for ever, quite overwhelmed him, so that he was bowed down, and as it were inconsolable, on their account. Now this is precisely the state in which our minds should be towards persons on a bed of sickness, whether they be rich or poor, friends or enemies. Their souls should be precious in our eyes: and we should exercise towards them that very same love which filled the bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ, "who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich^c." Nor let it be thought that this is proper for ministers only, or for those who have nothing else to occupy their time. David was accustomed to scenes of blood, and occupied day and night with the laborious duties of a General; yet *he* blended the feelings of sympathy and compassion with the intrepidity and ardour of a man of war. In like manner should *we*, however high our station, or numerous our engagements, find time and inclination for all the offices of christian love.]

That we may be stirred up to such benevolence, let us contemplate,

III. The benefit that will accrue from it to our own souls—

Our exertions, however great, may not **always** prosper in the way we could wish—

[We fear that Saul and Doeg were but little profited by the sympathy of David. And we also may abound in visiting the

^a Job xxx. 25. ^b Gal. vi. 2. Rom. xii. 15. ^c 2 Cor. viii. 9.

sick, and see but little fruit of our labour. Indeed, much of the fruit which we think we see, proves only like the blossom that is soon nipped by the frost, and disappoints our expectations. Not that our labour shall be altogether in vain^d. We are persuaded, that if we labour with assiduity and tenderness to benefit the souls of men, God will make *some* use of us. Like Isaiah, we may have occasion to say, "Who hath believed our report?" yet, like him, we shall have in the last day some to present to the Lord, saying, "Here am I, and the children thou hast given me." "The bread that we have cast upon the waters shall, in part at least, be found after many days."]

But our labour shall surely be recompensed into our own bosom—

[So David found it: his fastings and prayers, if lost to others, were not lost to himself: "they returned into his own bosom." And thus it will be with us. The very exercise of love, like the incense which regales the offerer with its odours, is a rich recompence to itself. Moreover, every exercise of love strengthens the habit of love in our souls, and thereby transforms us more and more into the Divine image. And may we not say, that exercises of love will bring God himself down into the soul? We appeal to those who are in the habit of visiting the chambers of the sick, whether they have not often found God more present with them on such occasions than at any other time or place? Have they not often, when they have gone with coldness, and even with reluctance, to visit the sick, received such tokens of God's acceptance, as have filled them with shame and self-abhorrence, for not delighting more in such offices of love?

But, if even *here* so rich a recompence is given, what shall we receive *hereafter*, when every act of love will be recorded, acknowledged, recompensed; and not even a cup of cold water given for the sake of Christ, shall lose its reward? Little as we think of such actions, (and little we ought to think of them *as done by ourselves*) our God and Saviour regards them with infinite delight, and will accept every one of them as done unto himself: "I was sick and in prison, and ye visited ME." Let all then know, if they thus invite the sick, the lame, the blind, to participate with them in their temporal and spiritual advantages, "they shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just^e."]

ADDRESS—

^d If this be the subject of a Sermon for a *Visiting Society*, or *Hospital*, any particular good that has been done to the souls of men may here be distinctly specified.

^e Luke xiv. 14. Heb. vi. 10.

1. The poor—

[We have represented you as *in some respects* under great disadvantages in a time of sickness: but *in other respects* the advantage is altogether on your side. The friends of the rich are almost uniformly bent on keeping from them all those who would seek to benefit their souls: and, if one get access to them, one scarcely dares to speak, except in gentle hints and dark insinuations; whilst their friends in general are doing all they can to divert their minds from all serious religion. But such friends as these give themselves no trouble about you; whilst the benevolent Christian who visits you begins at once to instruct you in the things that belong to your everlasting peace. Thus all the treasures of redeeming love are opened to you, whilst they are studiously withheld from the rich; and all the consolations of the Gospel are poured into your souls, whilst even a taste of them is denied to thousands, either through their own contempt of Christ, or through the blindness and prejudice of ungodly friends. Know ye then, that if on account of your want of temporal comforts we compassionate your state, we rather congratulate you on the advantages you enjoy for your immortal souls. God has said, that “he has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of his kingdom;” and therefore we call upon you to take *this* into your estimate of your condition, and to adore God for having chosen better for you than you would have chosen for yourselves.]

2. Those who engage in visiting the poor—

[This is a good and blessed office, in the conscientious discharge of which, religion in no small degree consists^f. Abound then, as far as your situation and circumstances will admit of it, in this holy work: but take especial care that you perform it in a proper spirit. If you would have those whom you visit to weep, you yourself must be filled with compassion, and weep over them. This is a state of mind which an angel might envy. Never did Jesus himself appear more glorious, not even on Mount Tabor, than when he wept at the grave of Lazarus^g. Nor does God ever delight in his people more than when he sees them abounding in acts of love to men for their Redeemer’s sake^h. Only see to it that you “draw out not your purse only, but “*your souls*” also to the afflicted, and God will recompense it into your bosom an hundred-foldⁱ.]

3. The congregation at large—

[In order to administer relief to any extent, considerable funds are necessary: and where any measure of benevolence

^f Jam. i. 27.

^h Matt. vi. 4.

^g John xi. 35.

ⁱ Isai. lviii. 10, 11.

exists, it will be a pleasure to contribute towards the carrying on a work of such incalculable importance. When St. Paul went up to confer with the Apostles at Jerusalem, they added nothing to his knowledge of the Gospel; "only they would that he should remember the poor: the same which I also (says he) was forward to do^k." To you then would we recommend the same benevolent disposition; and we pray God that there may be in you the same readiness to cultivate it to the uttermost. All may not have time or ability to do much in instructing and comforting the poor: but all, even the widow with a single mite, may testify their love to the poor, and their desire to advance the good work in which a select number are engaged. Even those who are "in deep poverty may abound unto the riches of liberality^l." Let all then "prove the sincerity of their love to Christ" by their compassion to his poor members^m; and let them know, that "even a cup of cold water given for his sake shall in no wise lose its reward."]

^k Gal. i. 10.

^l 2 Cor. viii. 1—4.

^m 2 Cor. viii. 8.

DLVII.

AWFUL STATE OF UNGODLY MEN.

Ps. xxxvi. 1. *The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.*

WHEN we speak of the wickedness of mankind, that command of our Lord is frequently cast in our teeth, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." But this command refers to an uncharitable ascribing of good actions to a bad principle; which, as we cannot see the heart, we are by no means authorized to do. But, if it do not authorize us to "call good evil," it assuredly does not require us to "call evil good." If we see sin, it is no uncharitableness to pronounce it sin: and, if the sin be habitual, it is no uncharitableness to say, that the heart from which it proceeds is bad and depraved. We are told by our Lord, that "the tree is to be judged of by its fruit; and that as a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit, so neither can a good tree habitually bring forth evil fruit^a." An error, and even a fault may be committed, without detracting from a person's general character: but a sinful course of life involves in it, of necessity, a

^a Matt. vii. 16—18.

corruption of heart, and carries with it, to any dispassionate mind, a conviction that the person who pursues that course has not within him the fear of God. This was the impression made on David's mind, when he said, "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes."

In confirmation of this sentiment, I will shew,

I. How God interprets sin—

God views sin not merely as contained in overt acts, but as existing in the soul: and he judges of its malignity, not according to its aspect upon social happiness, but as it bears on himself, and affects his honour. Throughout the whole Sacred Volume, God speaks of it in this view. He represents sin as striking at the relation which subsists between him and his creatures:

1. As adultery—

[He is the Husband of his Church^b, and claims our entire and exclusive regards^c. When these are alienated from him, and fixed on the creature, he calls it adultery^d: and hence St. James, speaking of those who sought the friendship of the world, addresses them as "adulterers and adulteresses^e;" because, as the Spouse of Christ, they have placed on another the affections due to him alone.]

2. As rebellion—

[God, as the Governor of the universe, requires us to obey his laws. But sin is an opposition to his will, and a violation of his laws: and therefore God says respecting it, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be^f." Here, let it be observed, it is not the overt act, but the disposition only, that is so characterized: and, consequently, if the very disposition as existing in the soul is an equivocal proof of the wickedness of the heart, much more must the outward act, and especially the constant habit of the life, be considered as a decisive evidence that the soul itself is corrupt.]

3. As idolatry—

[God alone is to be worshipped: and to put any thing in competition with him is to make it an idol. Hence the love of money is called idolatry^g: and the indulgence of a sensual

^b Isai. liv. 5.

^c James iv. 4.

^e Hos. iii. 3.

^f Rom. viii. 7.

^d Ezek. xvi. 37.

^g Col. iii. 5.

appetite is to “make our belly our god^h.” And hence St. John, having set forth “the Lord Jesus as the true God and eternal life,” guards us against any alienation of our hearts from him, in these memorable words: “Little children, keep yourselves from idolsⁱ.” And here let me again observe, it is the disposition, and not any outward act, that has this construction put upon it.]

4. As downright atheism—

[It is represented as a denial of all God’s attributes and perfections. It denies *his omnipresence and omniscience*; since men, in committing it, say, “How doth God know? Can he judge through the dark cloud? Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he seeth not; and he walketh in the circuit of the heaven^k,” and is at no leisure to attend to what is done on earth. It denies *his justice and his holiness*: it says, “I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my heart^l.” “God will never require at my hands what I do^m.” “He will not do good; neither will he do evilⁿ.” So far from having any thing to fear from God, “Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them^o.” Sin denies yet further *the right of God to control us*: “We are Lords; we will come no more to thee^p.” “Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us^q?” “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit is there, that we should pray unto him^r?” It even denies *the very existence of God*: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God^s.” Hence St. Paul calls us “Atheists in the world^t.” Men will not say all this with their *lips*; but it is the language of their *lives, and therefore of their hearts*.]

Having seen how God *interprets* sin, and what *construction* he puts upon it, we are prepared to see, II. What interpretation we also should put upon it—

No inference was ever more legitimately drawn from the plainest premises, than that which forced itself upon David’s mind, from a view of the ungodly world. And the same conclusion must we also arrive at, from all that we see around us: “The transgression of the wicked saith within our hearts that there is no fear of God before their eyes.”

1. There is no sense of God’s presence—

^h Phil. iii. 19.

ⁱ 1 John v. 20, 21.

^k Job xxii. 13, 14. See also Ps. lxxiii. 11. and xciv. 7.

^l Deut. xxix. 19.

^m Ps. x. 13.

ⁿ Zeph. i. 12.

^o Mal. ii. 17.

^p Jer. ii. 31.

^q Ps. xii. 4.

^r Job xxi. 14, 15.

^s Ps. xiv. 1.

^t Eph. ii. 12. ἄθεοι.

[A thief would not steal, if he knew that the eyes of the proprietor were fastened on him: yea, even the presence of a child would be sufficient to keep the adulterer from the perpetration of his intended crimes. But he regards not the presence of Almighty God. If he be out of the sight of any fellow-creature, he saith *in his heart*, “No eye seeth me^u:” never reflecting, that “the darkness is no darkness with God, but the night is as clear as the day; the darkness and light to him are both alike^x.”]

2. There is no regard to his authority—

[Men will stand in awe of the civil magistrate, who he knows to be “an avenger of evil, and that he does not bear the sword in vain.” To see to what an extent men stand in awe of earthly governors, conceive in what a state of confusion even this Christian land would be, if only for one single week the laws were suspended, and no restraint were imposed on men beyond that which they feel from a regard to the authority of God: we should not dare to venture out of our houses, or scarcely be safe in our houses, by reason of the flood of iniquity which would deluge the land. And though it is true that every one would not avail himself of the licence to commit all manner of abominations, it is equally true, that it is not God’s authority that would restrain them: for the same authority that says, “Do not kill or commit adultery,” says, Thou shalt “live not unto thyself, but unto Him that died for thee and rose again.” And if we be not influenced by it in every thing, we regard it truly in nothing^y.]

3. There is no concern about his approbation—

[If we be lowered in the estimation of our fellow-creatures, how mortified are we, insomuch that we can scarcely bear to abide in the place where we are so degraded. An exile to the remotest solitude would be preferable to the presence of those whose good opinion we have forfeited. But who inquires whether God be pleased or displeased? Who lays to heart the disapprobation which he has excited in his mind, or the record that is kept concerning him in the book of his remembrance? If we preserve our outward conduct correct, so as to secure the approbation of our fellow-creatures, we are satisfied, and care little what God sees within, or what estimate he forms of our character.]

4. There is no fear of his displeasure—

[One would think it impossible that men should believe in a future state of retribution, and yet be altogether careless about the doom that shall be awarded to them. They think

^u Job xxiv. 15. ^x Ps. cxxxix. 11, 12. ^y James ii. 10, 11.

that God is merciful, too merciful to punish any one, unless it be, perhaps, some extraordinarily flagrant transgressor. Hence, though they know they are sinners, they never think of repenting, or of changing that course of life which, if the Scriptures be true, must lead them to perdition. Only see the state of the first converts, or of any who have felt their danger of God's wrath; and then tell me whether that be the experience of the world at large? Where do we see the weeping penitents smiting on their breast, and crying for mercy? Where do we see persons flying to Christ for refuge, as the manslayer fled from the sword of the avenger, that was pursuing him? In the world at large we see nothing of this; nothing, in fact, but supineness and security: so true is the judgment of the Psalmist respecting them, that "there is no fear of God before their eyes." The same testimony St. Paul also bears^z: and we know that his record is true.]

If, then, David's views be indeed correct, SEE,

1. How marvellous is the forbearance of our God!—

[He sees the state of every living man: he sees, not our actions only, but our very thoughts: for "he trieth the heart and reins." What evils, then, does he behold in every quarter of the globe! Not a country, a town, a village, a family, no, nor a single soul, exempt from the common malady! all fallen; all "enemies in their hearts to God by wicked works!" Take but a single city, our own metropolis for instance, and what a mass of iniquity does God behold in it, even in the short space of twenty-four hours! Is it not astonishing that God's wrath does not break forth against us, even as against Sodom and Gomorrha, to consume us by fire; or that another deluge does not come, to sweep us away from the face of the earth? Dear Brethren, "account this long-suffering of our God to be salvation^a," and "let it lead every one of you to repentance^b."]]

2. How unbounded is the love of God, that has provided a Saviour for us!—

[Behold, instead of destroying the world by one stroke of his indignation, he has sent us his co-equal and co-eternal Son to effect a reconciliation between him and us, by the sacrifice of himself! Yes, "he has so loved the world, as to have given his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life^c." "He sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world," as we might rather have expected; "but that the world through him might be saved^d."

^z Rom. iii. 18.

^a 2 Pet. iii. 15.

^b Rom. ii. 4.

^c John iii. 16.

^d John iii. 17.

What, then, my beloved Brethren, "shall your transgressions say to you?" Shall they not say, "Avail yourselves of the proffered mercy? Delay not an hour to seek an interest in that Saviour, that so your sins may be blotted out, and your souls be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus?" Let this love of God constrain you to surrender up yourselves to him as his redeemed people; and so to walk before him in newness of heart and life, that "Christ may be magnified in you, whether by life or death^e."]

^e Phil. i. 20.

DLVIII.

THE SELF-FLATTERING DELUSIONS OF SINNERS EXPOSED.

Ps. xxxvi. 2. *He flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful.*

IT may well astonish us to see how careless and indifferent men are about the favour of God. But the Psalmist assigns the true reason for it. Every one cherishes in his mind some delusion, whereby he lulls his conscience asleep; and thus, notwithstanding his guilt and danger, rests satisfied with his state, till God himself interpose, in a way of mercy or of judgment, to undeceive him.

To elucidate his words, we shall,

I. Point out some of the self-flattering delusions which are commonly entertained—

We shall notice some which obtain,

1. Among the careless world—

[They imagine that God does not regard the conduct of his creatures^a — — — Or, that he is too merciful to consign them over to everlasting perdition^b — — — Or that, at least, a little repentance will suffice^c — — — Or that, at all

^a Job xxii. 13. Ps. xciv. 7. But it is a sad delusion, Prov. xv. 3. 1 Cor. iv. 5. Eccl. xii. 14. Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

^b Zeph. i. 12. 2 Pet. iii. 4. But this is also a fatal error, Ps. ix. 17. and 2 Pet. ii. 4, 5, 6, 9.

^c Repentance is not so small a thing as men suppose. It is nothing less than a thorough renovation of the heart in all its powers; a putting off the old man, and a putting on the new, John iii. 3. Eph. iv. 22—24.

events, it is time enough yet to think of turning seriously to God^d — — —]

2. Among those who profess some regard for religion—

[They judge that a moral conduct, with a regular observance of the outward forms of religion, is all that is required^e — — — Or, that the embracing of the truths of the Gospel, and joining themselves to the Lord's people, is a true and scriptural conversion^f — — — Or, that the having, at some former period, had their affections strongly exercised about religious things, is a proof of their present acceptance with God^g — — — Or, that a present pleasure in religious duties, with a partial mortification of sin, is a sufficient evidence of their sincerity^h — — —]

But the vanity of these delusions will appear, while we,

II. Shew when and how they shall be removed—

The eyes of all will sooner or later be opened, and their vain conceits be dissipated—

1. Some will have their errors rectified *in conversion*—

[When the Spirit of God enlightens the mind of man, he scatters the clouds of ignorance and error; and, as far at least as respects the foregoing delusions, guides them into the knowledge of the truth. He shews us, not only that our sins are known to God, but that we are in danger of condemnation on account of them, and that we ought to turn to God instantly, and with our whole heartsⁱ — — — He discovers to us also, that no form of godliness, no change of sentiment, no moving of the affections, no partial reformation of the life, will suffice; but that, if we will serve the Lord in truth, we must give up ourselves wholly to him and without reserve^k

^d Acts xxiv. 25. If other delusions have proved fatal to thousands, this has destroyed tens of thousands. The folly of it appears from James iv. 14. Luke xii. 20. and Gen. vi. 3. Prov. i. 24—31.

^e Our Lord warns us against this mistake, Matt. v. 20.

^f But what did this avail the Foolish Virgins? Matt. xxv. 1—12. or Judas? xxvi. 21—24. See also, Matt. xiii. 30, 40, 41, 42.

^g Such notions are common, Matt. xiii. 20. but awfully delusive, Heb. vi. 4—6. 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.

^h This is the thought of many, Isa. lviii. 2, 3. Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32. Ps. lxxviii. 34, 35. But nothing less than an uniform and unreserved obedience to God will prove us to be God's children, 1 John iii. 7. Mark ix. 43—48.

ⁱ Acts ii. 37. and xvi. 30.

^k Ps. xviii. 23. and Heb. xii. 1.

— — — Particularly he makes us to see “*the hateful-ness*” of the most refined hypocrisy, and even of the remains of sin, which, in spite of our most earnest endeavours to destroy it, yet war in our members¹ — — —]

2. Others will have their misapprehensions removed *in condemnation*—

[Too many, alas! hold fast their delusions in spite of God’s word, and all the merciful or afflictive dispensations of his providence. But, as soon as ever they come into the eternal world, they will be undeceived. The sight of a holy God, together with the hearing of that sentence which their once compassionate, but now indignant Judge will pass upon them; and, above all, the feeling of the torments of hell, will convince them of their mistakes, and leave them no room to doubt, but that the care of the soul was “the one thing needful,” and that every word of God shall be fulfilled in its season — — —]

ADVICE—

1. Confer not with flesh and blood in the concerns of religion—

[All unregenerate men endeavour to bring down the word of God to some standard of their own; and consequently will discourage in us every thing that goes beyond the line which they have drawn for themselves. But, if they deceive us, they cannot afford us any remedy in the eternal world. The word of God is the only standard of right and wrong; and by that we shall be judged in the last day. Let us therefore regulate our sentiments and conduct, not according to the opinions of fallible men, but according to the unerring declarations of God himself. And instead of endeavouring to lower the demands of God to our wishes or attainments, let us labour to raise our practice to the strictest requisitions of God’s law^m.]

2. Pray for the teaching of God’s Spirit—

[With deceitful hearts, a subtle adversary, and a tempting world, we are continually in danger: nor can we hope to be guided aright but by the Spirit of the living God. Even the Scriptures themselves will be “a dead letter,” and “a sealed book” to us, unless the Spirit of God open our understandings to understand them. He has promised to lead us into all truth; and if we be really disposed to embrace the truth, he will discover it to us. But if, through our hatred of the light, we shut our eyes against it, God will give us over to our delusions, that we may believe a lieⁿ. Let us therefore guard

¹ Ps. lxvi. 18. James i. 26. Job xlii. 6. Rom. vii. 21—24.

^m Phil. iii. 13, 14.

ⁿ John iii. 19. 2 Thess. ii. 10—12. and Isai. lxvi. 3, 4.

against self-deception, and submit ourselves to the guidance of God's Spirit. Then, though our capacities be ever so small, we shall be kept from every fundamental error^o, and be "made wise unto salvation through faith in Christ."]

3. Seek above all to know the hatefulness of sin—

[Nothing but a discovery of the evil of sin will effectually preserve us from self-deceit. To produce this, is the first saving work of the Spirit: and the more this is wrought in the heart, the more shall we be on our guard against all self-flattering delusions.]

^o Isai. xxxv. 8. and Matt. xi. 25.

DLIX.

SIN TO BE ABHORRED.

Ps. xxxvi. 4. *He abhorreth not evil.*

THE standard of morals in the Christian world is far below that which is established in the Sacred Records: and hence arises that self-justifying spirit which prevails in every place. Gross iniquities, which affect the welfare of society, are condemned: but less flagrant offences are regarded as venial, and justified as unavoidable in this state of human existence. The person immediately referred to in my text was Saul, who, amidst all his professions of penitence, still entertained evil designs against the life of David. But we need not limit the words to him. They are, like many similar passages cited by St. Paul in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Romans^a, expressive of the state of our fallen nature, and universally applicable to every child of man. To elucidate them, I will shew,

I. How great an evil sin is—

There is scarcely any thing which is vile and lothesome to which sin is not compared. Let us instance this in leprosy; which may be considered as the most spreading, the most defiling, the most incurable of all disorders. In reference to this does the Prophet Isaiah speak of himself and all around him as utterly undone: "Woe is me! I am undone: I am a man

^a Rom. iii. 10—19.

of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips^b." But, not to lay an undue stress on figures like these, I will consider sin,

1. As a violation of God's holy Law—

[The Law of God is said to be "holy, and just, and good^c." It is holy, as being a perfect transcript of God's mind and will: it is just, as requiring nothing which does not necessarily arise out of our relation to him and to each other: and it is good, as tending, in every instance, to the happiness of the creature, and to the honour of our Creator. Now "sin is a transgression of this Law^d;" and that very circumstance it is which renders it "so exceeding sinful^e." Were the Law itself less excellent, a departure from it would be less odious: but to rebel against it, is to prefer the mind of Satan to the mind of God, and the service of the devil to the service of our God. If we would see in what light God views it, let us go back to the time of Adam, on whose heart this Law was completely written, and see what one single transgression of it brought on him; and not on him only, but on the whole creation: and then we shall say indeed, that the evil of sin far exceeds all that language can express, or that any finite intelligence can conceive.]

2. As a contradiction to his blessed Gospel—

[To obviate the effects of sin, God sent his only dear Son into the world; that he might "put away the guilt of it by the sacrifice of himself^f;" and that by the operations of his Holy Spirit he might repress its power, and "destroy the works of the devil^g." But sin contravenes all his merciful intentions, and defeats all his gracious purposes. Now, let us suppose that the Lord Jesus Christ were now at this time to come into this assembly; and that, instead of receiving him with all that admiring and adoring gratitude that would become us, we were to rise up against him, and beat him down, and trample him under foot; and that, on his exhibiting the wounds once made for us on Calvary, and yet bleeding for us, we were to regard his blood as an accursed thing, and seize upon him, and nail him to a cross, and load him with our execrations till we saw him dead before our eyes: What would be thought of us? Yea, in a moment of reflection, what should we think of ourselves? Yet *that* is what sin does, and what all of us do whenever we commit sin: for so has the Apostle said, that "we tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of his grace^h;" yea, "we crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to

^b Isai. vi. 5.

^c Rom. vii. 12.

^d 1 John iii. 4.

^e Rom. vii. 13.

^f Heb. ix. 26.

^g 1 John iii. 8.

^h Heb. x. 29.

an open shameⁱ." No wonder, then, that God, when dissuading us from the commission of sin, addresses us in those pungent terms, "O, do not that abominable thing which I hate^k."

But instead of our regarding it with the abhorrence it deserves, I am constrained to shew you,

II. What sad indulgence it meets with at our hands—

View the generality of men—

[So far from abhorring sin, they love it, they delight in it, and, to use the strong expression of Scripture, "they wallow in it, even as a sow wallows in the mire^l." In fact, it is the very element in which men live. Look all around you: I speak not of those who "run into every excess of riot;" though they, alas! are very numerous, and, for the most part, "glory in their shame:" but I speak of the great mass of the community, the rich, the poor, the old, the young: Whom amongst them do you find regulating themselves according to God's holy Law? Who has not a standard of his own, such as use and fashion have prescribed? and who is not satisfied with conforming to *that*, without ever once thinking of God's Law, or so much as desiring to approve himself to him? Verily, "the whole world lieth in wickedness," and under the dominion of the *Wicked one*^m.]

But, passing by these, behold the more decent part of the community—

[Doubtless there are many who are more decorous in their conduct, and more observant of a form of godliness. But I ask, even in reference to *them*, How many of them do really view sin as God views it? That some enormous evils are abhorred, I readily acknowledge: but they are such only as, by a kind of common consent, are stamped with general reprobation. As for sin, *as sin*, and *as a departure from God's holy Law*, who hates it? Who lothes it? Who abhors it? Yea, I ask, Who does not *hear* it, without *offence*? and *see* it, without *disgust*? and *harbour* it, without *remorse*? Let these questions sink down into your ears: carry them home with you, as tests of your real state: put them home to your conscience, and give an answer to them as before God. You well know, that if any one loaded our parents with deep and unmerited disgrace, he would soon excite our indignation. You know, also, that the sight and smell of a putrid carcase would create in us a loathing which we could scarce endure. Nor need you be told, what feelings of remorse would follow the commission of murder. But sin, whether heard or seen or felt, begets in

ⁱ Heb. vi. 6.

^k Jer. xliv. 4.

^l 2 Pet. ii. 22.

^m 1 John v. 19. ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ. Eph. ii. 2.

us no such painful emotions. To abhor it, and “abhor ourselves” for the hidden workings of it in our souls, as holy Job did^a, we know not: to “lothe ourselves” as hateful and abominable on account of it^o, so as to “blush and be confounded before God,” and scarcely to “dare to lift up our eyes to heaven” on account of our conscious vileness^p, is a state of mind to which we are utter strangers, unless on account of some great iniquity, which, if known, would expose us to indelible disgrace. To abhor evil merely on account of its intrinsic hatefulness, and its offensiveness to God, is an attainment very rare, and even in the best of men very weak and imperfect. I think, then, that every one of us may consider himself as condemned in my text, and may take shame to himself as bearing that humiliating character, “He abhorreth not evil.”]

SEE, then,

1. How little there is of true sanctity amongst us—

[Of the saints of old it was said, “They could not bear those who were evil^q:” whereas *we* can “find pleasure in their society^r,” and, provided they wrap up their jests in elegant allusions and witty turns^s,” can join with them in laughing at thoughts, which, if delivered in coarser language, we should condemn: we even “set ourselves in a way that is not good,” shewing no aversion to “have fellowship in the works of darkness, which we ought rather with decided boldness to reprove^t.” How unlike are we to David, who says, “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy Law^u!” Indeed, Brethren, we should see and mourn over our great defects; and, instead of indulging self-complacent thoughts on account of our not being so bad as others, should rather smite on our breasts with conscious guilt, and humble ourselves before God as “the very chief of sinners.”]

2. How greatly we need the provisions of the Gospel—

[I have before said, that, to remedy the evils which sin has brought into the world, God has sent his only dear Son to make atonement for us, and his Holy Spirit to renew us after the divine image. And now I ask you, Whether any thing less than this would have sufficed? What could you have done to expiate your own guilt? Or how could you ever, with such polluted hearts as yours, have attained a meetness for heaven? You might as easily have built a world, as have effected either of these things. Nor is there any difference between one man and another *in these respects*. One may

^a Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6.

^o Ezek. xxxvi. 31.

^p Luke xviii. 13.

^q Rev. ii. 2.

^r Rom. i. 32.

^s Eph. v. 4. *ἐντραπέλια*.

^t Eph. v. 11.

^u Ps. cxix. 136.

differ from another in respect of outward sin: but in respect of alienation of heart from the holy Law of God, and an utter incapacity to restore ourselves to his favour, all are on a perfect level. I entreat you, then, all of you without exception, to “wash in the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness^x,” and to cry mightily to God for the renewing influences of his Holy Spirit, that so you may have your past iniquities forgiven, and be “created anew after the divine image in righteousness and true holiness^y.” Then will you be brought to that state which every true Christian must attain, “abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good^z,” and then will God be glorified in you, both in this world and in the world to come^a.]

^x Zech. xiii. 1. ^y Eph. iv. 24. ^z Rom. xii. 9. ^a 2 Thess. i. 10.

DLX.

GOD'S WORD AND WORKS MYSTERIOUS.

Ps. xxxvi. 6. *Thy judgments are a great deep.*

WE little think how highly privileged the meanest Christian is above all the sages of antiquity. The greatest philosophers of Greece and Rome were unable to account for the existence of moral evil upon earth, or to see through the disorder and confusion which it has produced throughout the world. But the servant of the Lord is instructed to trace every thing to an All-wise and Almighty Power, who brings light out of darkness and order from confusion, and overrules every thing for the glory of his own name. To this Divine Being, the child of God has recourse in all his difficulties, and in the contemplation of Him finds comfort under the sorest trials. David, under the persecutions of Saul, was reduced to the greatest extremities: but, after complaining of the subtlety of his implacable enemy, “he encouraged himself in the Lord his God,” who was able to accomplish his own gracious designs, not only in opposition to this powerful adversary, but by the very means which Saul was using to defeat them.

The word “judgments” has, in Scripture, many different significations. As used in my text, we may consider it as comprehending both the word and the

works of God. In illustration, therefore, of our text, we may observe that "God's judgments are a great deep,"

I. As displayed in his word—

The whole of Revelation is a mystery. But, that we may not be led over too wide a field, we will confine our attention to two points :

1. Our fall in Adam—

[This is a fact to which the whole Scripture bears witness: "In Adam all died^a;" and "by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation^b." Now, that he should himself be drawn into sin, circumstanced as he was, perfect in his nature, and supplied with every thing which his soul could desire, is wonderful. But it is a fact, that he did commit sin, and brought upon himself God's righteous indignation. That in his sin all his posterity should be involved, is a yet deeper mystery; for which it would be impossible for us to account, if God had not plainly and unequivocally revealed it. That the whole world is full of sin, is obvious to the most superficial observer. That the very nature of man is corrupt, is also evident. No one who has ever marked the dispositions of an infant can entertain a doubt of it^c. But was man first created in such a state? Can we conceive of a holy Being forming, in the first instance, such unholy creatures? Human wisdom is altogether lost, and confounded, whilst occupied on this mysterious subject. But God has explained it to us in his word. He has told us, what, when revealed, is a self-evident truth, that "no man can bring a clean thing out of an unclean^d." He has told us, also, what we could never have imagined or conceived, that the very guilt of Adam is transmitted to us, because he was not a private and isolated individual, but the head and representative of all his descendants: so that we come into the world, not only corrupt creatures, but "children of wrath^e."

Now say, whether this be not "a great deep." Who can comprehend it? Who is not lost in wonder at the contemplation of it?]

2. Our recovery by Jesus Christ—

[That there should be a possibility of restoring man to the divine favour, is what no finite intelligence could ever have conceived. Not one of the fallen angels ever was restored: nor could the restoration of man, it might be thought, have ever been compatible with the honour of our offended God.

^a 1 Cor. xv. 22.

^b Rom. v. 17, 18.

^c Ps. li. 5.

^d Job xiv. 4.

^e Eph. ii. 3.

But God contrived a way, wherein he might be “just, and yet the justifier of sinful men^f.” For this end he gave his only-begotten Son, to stand in our place, to bear our sins, to “make reconciliation for our iniquities, and to bring in an everlasting righteousness,” wherein we might stand accepted before our God.

Well might the Apostle say, “Great is the mystery of godliness^g.” Who can contemplate “God manifest in human flesh,” and dying in the place of his own sinful and rebellious creatures, and not stand amazed at this stupendous effort of love and mercy? Truly, it far “surpasses all the knowledge” whether of men or angels. And, if it were not confirmed to us by testimony that is absolutely unquestionable, we could not but regard it altogether as “a cunningly-devised fable;” so unfathomable are the depths contained in it, and so incomprehensible the love^h.]

But let us contemplate God’s judgments,

II. As manifested in his works—

Let us notice them in his works,

1. Of providence—

[*These* also are as inscrutable as redemption itself. Who, that surveyed Joseph in all his different scenes of woe, could ever imagine whither they were conducting him, or to what they would lead? Truly there is “a wheel within a wheelⁱ,” and whilst all appears uncertainty around us, every thing is working to a fixed end, even to accomplish what God himself has predicted in his word. The smallest incidents that can be imagined are often productive of the most wonderful events: the casting of a lot, the sleepless restlessness of Ahasuerus, the casual turning to a particular record, to a common observer would appear as matters of trifling moment: yet on them depended the preservation of the whole Jewish people^k. And we too, if we look back upon our past lives, may find many minute occurrences, which seemed to be of no account at the time, but which contributed in the most essential manner to influence and fix our future destinies; so that at this hour there is not one amongst us whose life would not serve for the illustrating of this point, and constrain him with the profoundest admiration to exclaim, “How unsearchable are God’s judgments, and his ways past finding out^l!”]

2. Of grace—

[Who, that had seen Paul in his unconverted state, would ever have supposed that God had designs of love towards him?

^f Rom. iii. 26.

^g 1 Tim. iii. 16. ^h Eph. iii. 18, 19.

ⁱ Ezek. i. 16.

^k Esther iii. 7. and vi. 1—3.

^l Rom. xi. 33.

Yet, when he had well nigh filled up the measure of his iniquities, God arrested him in his career, and made him a most distinguished monument of his mercy; insomuch that all future ages were to regard him as "a pattern," by which the extent of God's mercy might be estimated, and the hopes of penitents be encouraged^m. Certainly the conduct of Onesimus towards his master Philemon must appear a very strange link in the purposes of heaven, relative to his salvation: yet were his dishonesty and flight made use of by God as means to bring him under the ministry of St. Paul, and, through that, to a conversion of soul to God, and to the everlasting possession of happiness and gloryⁿ. Not that God's designs of mercy towards him lessened in any degree the guilt which he contracted: nor is sin of any kind the less sinful on account of the use which God may make of it for the accomplishment of his own designs: for then the murderers of our blessed Lord must have been accounted the best, rather than the most guilty, of mankind. No: sin is a deadly evil, by whomsoever it is committed, and whatsoever it may effect: but this I say, that God both does and will accomplish his own eternal counsels, in ways which no finite wisdom could have contrived, nor any finite power have brought to a successful issue. "Verily," says the prophet, "thou art a God that hidest thyself^o." And so, indeed, we may all say. For who can look back upon the way in which he has been brought from his youth up even to this present moment, and especially upon the way in which he has been led to the knowledge of the Saviour, and not stand amazed at "the goodness and mercy that have followed him," and at the wisdom and power that have effected so great things for him? Yes: we must all fully acquiesce in that sentiment of Zophar: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? it is deeper than hell; what canst thou know? the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea^p."

Let us, then, LEARN from hence,

1. Submission to God's will—

[We may have been brought into circumstances of the most afflictive nature: but we should remember who it is that ordereth all things, even to the falling of a sparrow upon the ground. Men and devils may be labouring for our destruction: and God may suffer them to proceed to the very utmost extremity, till, like the murderers of our Lord, they may exult in, what appears to them, the full attainment of

^m 1 Tim. i. 12—16.

^o Isai. xlv. 15.

ⁿ Philem. ver. 15.

^p Job xi. 7—9.

their purpose; but God says to all of them, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther." True it is that "His way is in the sea, and his footsteps are not known^a:" but you must never forget, that though "clouds and darkness are round about him, righteousness and judgment are the basis of his throne^r." "What he does, you may not at present know: but you shall know hereafter^s:" and you may be sure that at the last you shall add your testimony to that of all his saints, "He hath done all things well^t." Your way may be circuitous, and attended with great difficulties: but you will find, at last, that it was "the right way^u," the way most conducive to your best interests, and most calculated to advance his glory. Let us, then, wait to "see the end of the Lord^x;" and, under all circumstances, say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good."]

2. Affiance in his word—

[*There* is light sufficient: *there* we see what God will most assuredly accomplish. There may *appear* to be a discordance between the word and works of God; but they will be found to harmonize at last: "nor shall one jot or tittle of his word ever fail." Lay hold, then, on the promises of God: rest on them: plead them at the throne of his grace: and expect the accomplishment of them in due season. But be not impatient under any delays: "If the vision tarry, wait for it;" assured that "it will not tarry" beyond the appointed time^v. Never, under any circumstances, say, "All these things are against me;" because God has promised that "they shall all work together for your good^z." But, conceive of a soul just liberated from the body, and from the throne of God looking back upon the way in which it has been brought thither; with what admiration will it then be filled! and what praises will it pour forth on account of the dispensations which till now it was not able to unravel! *This* should now be the posture of your soul. Most safely may you trust in God, to the full extent of his promises: for, whatever difficulties may lie in his way, "His counsel shall stand; and He will do all his will."]

^a Ps. lxxvii. 19.

^r Ps. xcvi. 2.

^s John xiii. 7.

^t Mark vii. 37.

^u Ps. cvii. 7.

^x James v. 11.

^v Hab. ii. 3.

^z Rom. viii. 28.

DLXI.

THE LOVING-KINDNESS OF GOD.

Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8. *How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the*

fatness of thy house : and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

THE more we know of man, the more shall we see the folly of trusting in an arm of flesh : but, the more we are acquainted with God, the more enlarged will be our expectations from him, and the more unreserved our confidence in his power and grace. David had found by bitter experience, that no dependence could be placed on the protestations of Saul. But he had a friend, in whose protection he could trust ; and in the contemplation of whose character he could find the richest consolation, while his views of man filled him with nothing but grief and anguish. Having expatiated upon *his* perfections, as contrasted with the deceitfulness and depravity of man, he bursts forth into a rapturous admiration of his love.

His words furnish us with an occasion to consider the loving-kindness of God, in the precise view in which it is exhibited in our text,

I. As a subject for adoring gratitude—

[Wherever we turn our eyes, we behold the most astonishing displays of God's love. Every work of creation, every dispensation of providence, every effort of grace, exhibits him to us in the most endearing view. But most of all must we admire the wonders of redemption. This is the work whereby God commends his love to us^a. This is the one subject of adoration to all the saints in glory^b. No sooner was it declared in the incarnation of Christ, than multitudes of the heavenly host began a new song, singing "Glory to God in the highest^c." Yea, from that moment have they been occupied in exploring its mysteries^d. But so unsearchable are its heights and depths, that no finite understanding can fully comprehend, nor will eternity suffice to unfold, all the wonders contained in it^e. "How excellent then is thy loving-kindness, O God!"]

II. As a ground for implicit confidence—

[This is not a speculative subject, but is influential in the hearts of all that give it a due measure of their attention. It is this which encourages sinners to approach their God with confidence. In the view of this, no guilt appals, no strait

^a Rom. v. 8.

^b Rev. v. 11—18.

^c Luke ii. 13, 14.

^d 1 Pet. i. 12.

^e Eph. iii. 18, 19.

depresses, no grief dejects. Whatever we want of pardon, peace, or strength, one thought suffices to support the soul; "he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!" This is the genuine and legitimate use which we are to make of the loving-kindness of God^g. We are to go to him as to a Father, confessing our faults^h; to follow him as our Guide in all our waysⁱ; and to commit ourselves to him without fear, knowing that he will either extricate us from all trouble^k, or overrule it for our good^l.]

III. As a pledge of all imaginable blessings at his hands—

[There is nothing which can conduce to our happiness either in time or eternity, which we are not warranted to expect at God's hands, provided we contemplate, and be suitably impressed with, the excellencies of his love.

The priests of old feasted their families with the offerings which belonged to them by virtue of their office^m. Now to our great High-Priest belong all the glory and blessedness of heaven: and every member of his family is privileged to partake with him. In his house he spreads his feastⁿ, and says to his dear children, Come, eat and drink abundantly, O beloved^o, and let your souls delight themselves with fatness^p. And who can declare what "abundant satisfaction" their souls feel while feeding on the promises of his word, and the communications of his love; or how enviable is the state of those who are thus highly privileged^q? Surely if we taste this promised blessing^r, we may well desire rather to be door-keepers in his house, than to enjoy the splendour of an earthly court^s.

But there are still sweeter fruits of God's love to be enjoyed in heaven. *There* flows a river, which gladdens that holy city, the new Jerusalem^t, and fills with unspeakable delight every inhabitant of those blissful mansions. *There* is a fulness of joy, emanating from the fountain of the Deity, and filling with God's own blessedness every soul according to its capacity^u. Of this shall every one be "made to drink;" and, drinking of it, shall thirst no more for ever^x.]

APPLICATION—

[Let the love of God in Christ Jesus be our meditation

^f Rom. viii. 32.

^g Ps. ix. 10.

^h Luke xv. 18, 19.

ⁱ Heb. xi. 8.

^k Dan. iii. 17.

^l Phil. i. 19, 20.

¹ Pet. iv. 19.

^m Numb. xviii. 11.

ⁿ Isai. xxv. 6.

^o Cant. v. 1.

^p Isai. lv. 2.

^q Ps. lxxv. 4.

^r Jer. xxxi. 14.

^s Ps. lxxxiv. 10.

^t Ps. xlv. 4.

^u Rev. xxii. 1. and Ps. xvi. 11.

^x Ps. xvii. 15.

all the day — — — Let it lead us to trust in him both for body and soul — — — And let a sense of it shed abroad in our hearts, be the one object of our desire^y and delight^z — — —]

^y Ps. xxvii. 4.

^z Phil. iii. 8.

DLXII.

CHRIST THE FOUNTAIN OF LIFE AND LIGHT.

Ps. xxxvi. 9. *With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light.*

BY a sober consideration of Scripture metaphors we obtain a more full and comprehensive knowledge of divine truth, than could easily be obtained from the most laboured discussions. Besides, the ideas suggested by them strike the mind so forcibly, that they cannot fail of making a deep and lasting impression. Let us but notice the rich variety of figures whereby the Deity is set forth in the passage before us, and we shall be filled with admiring and adoring thoughts of his goodness. The Psalmist, illustrating the loving-kindness of his God, represents him first under the image of a hen gathering her chickens; then as an opulent host feasting his guests with the richest dainties; and then, in a beautiful climax, he compares him to the sun.

In our text there is no confusion of metaphor, as there would be if the former part referred to a fountain, and the latter to the sun. It is the sun alone that is spoken of: for that is the fountain both of light and life: and in discoursing upon it, we observe, that,

I. Christ is an inexhaustible source of all spiritual good—

Christ may be considered as peculiarly referred to in the metaphor before us—

[It is in Christ only that the perfections mentioned in the foregoing verses are combined^a. It is in him only that God unites justice with mercy^b, or adheres, in faithfulness, to his covenant engagements^c. Besides, it is in this view that Christ

^a ver. 5, 6.

^b Rom. iii. 26.

^c 2 Cor. i. 20.

is set forth throughout all the sacred oracles, by prophets^d, by Apostles^e, and more especially by himself^f — — — We may well therefore apply to him the comparison before us: and we shall find it admirably descriptive of his real character.]

He is to the spiritual, what the sun is to the material, world—

[The sun is “the fountain of light and life” to this lower world. When that is withdrawn, the earth is left in darkness, the vegetable world decays, and myriads of animals are secluded in a state of torpor. But when it returns in its brightness, it both dispels the darkness, and restores to nature her suspended powers — — —]

Thus, where Christ has not shined; universal darkness and death prevail. But when he arises on the soul, he enlightens it, and infuses into it a principle of life^g, whereby its faculties are made capable of spiritual exertions; and it is rendered “fruitful in all the fruits of righteousness to God’s praise and glory” — — —]

We have abundant encouragement to seek his influence, since,

II. They who live in communion with him shall surely participate his blessings—

As the sun shines in vain to him who secludes himself in a dungeon, so, unless we come forth to “Christ’s light, we cannot possibly behold his light.” But if we view him as we ought, we shall then attain the light of *knowledge*, the light of *comfort*, the light of *holiness*, the light of *glory*.

1. Our minds shall be enlightened with divine *knowledge*—

[By the light of the sun we behold the objects around us; and by the light of Christ we discern the things belonging to our peace. In his face all the glory of the Godhead shines^h, insomuch that he who has seen him, has seen the Father alsoⁱ. Nor is there any one subject relating to salvation which does not receive its clearest illustration from him—]

2. Our souls shall be enriched with heavenly *comfort*—

[The consolation we derive from other sources is light and unsubstantial: and the things which promise us most

^d Isai. lx. 1. Mal. iv. 2. ^e John i. 4, 9. Luke ii. 32. 2 Pet. i. 19.

^f John viii. 12. and xii. 46. ^g Eph. ii. 1.

^h 2 Cor. iv. 6. Col. i. 15. ⁱ John xiv. 9.

happiness, often prove only a fleeting meteor, or a delusive vapour. But a sight of Christ, of his fulness, his suitableness, his all-sufficiency, affords a ground of comfort, firm as the rocks, and lasting as eternity^k—]

3. Our hearts shall be “renewed in righteousness and true holiness”—

[Nothing produces such effects as a sight of Christ. We may hear the law proclaimed in all its terrors, and yet experience no abiding change. But a view of Christ as crucified for us, will break the most obdurate heart^l—raise the most desponding soul^m—inspire the selfish with unbounded loveⁿ—and fill the mourner with unutterable joy^o: In a word, it will change a sinful man into the very image of his God and Saviour^p.]

4. The light of *glory* itself shall also be enjoyed by us—

[Christ is the one source of happiness to all the hosts of heaven^q. To behold his beauty, to taste his love, to celebrate his praises, this is their employment, this their supreme felicity^r. Such too is the occupation, such the happiness of every true believer: he has an earnest of heaven in his soul; and this earnest is a pledge that, in due season, he shall receive the consummation of all his wishes in the immediate vision of his Saviour's glory, and the everlasting fruition of his love^s—]

INFER,

1. How great is the folly of seeking happiness in the creature!

[Created things, in comparison of Christ, are no more than a broken cistern to a fountain^t, or than a star in comparison of the meridian sun. Let us then seek our happiness in Christ, and in him alone. In him, as in the sun, there is a fulness and a sufficiency for all^u. And to him all may have access, if they will not obstinately immure themselves in impenitence and unbelief^x. Let us not then “kindle sparks for ourselves, or walk in the light of our own fires^y,” but “come forth to his light,” and “walk in it” to the latest hour of our lives^z.]

^k 2 Cor. i. 5.

^l Zech. xii. 10.

^m 1 Pet. i. 3.

ⁿ 1 John iii. 16.

^o 1 Pet. i. 8.

^p 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^q Rev. xxi. 23.

^r Rev. v. 8—13.

^s Eph. i. 13, 14. and 1 John iii. 2.

^t Jer. ii. 13.

^u Col. i. 19.

^x Eph. v. 14.

^y Isai. l. 11.

^z John xii. 35, 36.

2. How unspeakable is the blessedness of knowing Christ!

[If we could conceive ourselves in a region where a winter's midnight was perpetuated; and then be transported in idea to a climate, where noontide light, and vernal beauty, were uninterruptedly enjoyed, we might have some faint image of the change effected by the knowledge of Christ^a. Truly the Christian is in Goshen^b: or if, for a little moment he be in darkness, there ariseth up a light unto him in the midst of it^c, and his darkness becomes as the noon-day^d. And, in a little time "his sun shall no more go down; but his Lord shall be unto him an everlasting light, and his God his glory^e." O that this may be the constant pursuit, and the happy attainment of us all!]

^a 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^b Exod. ix. 26. and x. 22, 23.

^c Ps. cxii. 4.

^d Isai. lviii. 10.

^e Isai. lx. 19, 20.

DLXIII.

GOD'S CONTINUED CARE IMplored.

Ps. xxxvi. 10. *O continue thou thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart!*

DAVID, in all his troubles, "encouraged himself in the Lord his God." He was in great trouble at the time he wrote this psalm; but whether from the persecutions of Saul, or the rebellion of Absalom, is not certain. But his views of the Deity were exceeding grand: "Thy mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings." To this God he commits his cause; and, in behalf of himself and all his persecuted associates, prays, "O continue thou thy loving-kindness unto them that know thee, and thy righteousness unto the upright in heart!" The same petition will every faithful minister urge in behalf of himself and his people, under a full assurance that "all their fresh springs are in God^a;"

^a Ps. lxxxvii. 7.

and that God himself, if ever they be saved at all, must "work all their works in them^b." In this view, I will endeavour to shew you,

I. What need we all have of the blessing here implored—

The term "righteousness," in the Old Testament, is of very extensive meaning. In my text it imports "goodness," and, as joined with "loving-kindness," must be understood to mean, a continuance of God's tender and watchful care even to the end. And

Of this, all, whatever be their attainments, stand in need—

[Of the ignorant and ungodly I am not at present called to speak; but rather of "those who know God, and are upright before him." Now all of these, without any exception, "offend God in many things," and, "if God were extreme to mark what is done amiss, must perish." From gross and wilful transgressions they may be free: but "who can say, His heart is clean?" How many sins are committed there, which no eye but God's beholds! — — — But, waving sins of *commission*, how greatly do we offend in a way of *omission*! See how "exceeding broad are the demands of God's Law." Our duties to God, our neighbour, and ourselves, who can be said perfectly to *know* them all; and much less to *do* them — — — But, waving these also, let us mark only our sins of *defect*. Be it so: We do really love God: but do we love him "with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength?" We love our neighbour, too: but do we love him with the same intenseness, and constancy, and activity "as ourselves?" We believe in Christ also: but is our habit of dependence on him, and communion with him, like that of "a branch united to the vine?" We devote ourselves to his service: but are all our faculties and powers, both of mind and body, put forth into action, as if we were running a race, or fighting for our lives? Let us look at our very best services, whether in public or in private; our prayers, for instance: Are our confessions accompanied with that brokenness of heart which we ought to feel? or our petitions urged with that importunity which God requires? or our thanksgivings presented with that ardent gratitude which God's mercies, and especially the great blessings of redemption, call for at our hands? I must say, that the grossest iniquities of the ungodly do not, in my apprehension, more strongly mark our alienation from God, than do the very prayers and praises

^b Isai. xxvi. 12.

of the godly; so exceeding cold are they, and unsuited to our state as redeemed sinners.

We need, therefore, the continuance of God's tender mercies to us yet daily, as much as ever we did in our carnal and unregenerate state.]

And what should we do, if God should withdraw his loving-kindness from us?

[What would our "knowledge of God" avail us, or even our own "integrity?" Satan prevailed over our first parents, even in Paradise: how, then, could we withstand his power, if God should deliver us up into his hands? In point of knowledge and integrity, David was as eminent as any of the Scripture saints: yet you all know how he felt, when once he was left to the workings of his own heart. Hezekiah was perhaps not inferior to him: yet, when "God left him, to try him, that he might see all that was in his heart," he also fell, and brought upon himself and his posterity the sorest judgments^c. Who then amongst us could hope to stand, if God should withhold his loving-kindness from us, or suspend for a moment the communications of his grace?

We need, then, all of us to entreat of God to "*continue* his loving-kindness to us," or, as it is translated in the margin of our Bibles, to "*draw it out at length*." You all know how a rope, or line, or thread, is formed, by adding fresh materials continually, till it shall have attained its destined length. In reference to this, the prophet represents the ungodly as "*drawing out* iniquity as cords of vanity, and sin as a cart-rope^d," that is, by constant additions even to their dying hour. And precisely thus we need, that God, who has begun a good work in us, should carry it on even to the end, by *drawing out, and imparting to us*, such communications of his grace as our necessities require, till we have attained that measure which in his eternal counsels he has ordained, and we be fully "meet for our Master's use."]

Seeing, then, that we all need this blessing, let me shew you,

II. On what grounds all "who know God, and are upright before him," are authorized to expect it—

The petition in my text was offered under a full assurance that it should be granted: for he had scarcely uttered it before he saw, by faith, the answer given: "There," says he, "are the workers of iniquity fallen; they are cast down, and shall not be

^c 2 Chron. xxxii. 31.

^d See Isai. v. 18. with Bishop Lowth's note upon it.

able to stand." And we also may expect that it shall be answered to all who offer it in faith. We may expect God's continued care, since it is assured to us,

1. By the promises of God—

[Numberless are the promises which God has made to us respecting the continuance of his love towards all whom, according to his sovereign will, he has chosen to be the objects of it. David, in another psalm, says, "The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance^e." And again, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, upon them that fear him; and his righteousness unto children's children, to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them^f." In fact, the whole Scripture testifies that God will perfect that which concerneth his people^g; and that, having loved them, he will love them to the end^h. Taking, therefore, these promises, we may spread them before the Lord, in full assurance that they shall be fulfilled; and in the language of David may say to God, "Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to my supplications: *in thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousnessⁱ!*"]

2. By the intercession of Christ—

[St. John has said, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins^k." Yes, were it not that the Lord Jesus Christ lives to intercede for us in heaven, it could not be but that God's displeasure must break forth against us on ten thousand occasions: but he prevails for us, as Aaron prevailed for Israel of old, through his unwearied intercessions. To this Peter was indebted, when he denied his Lord with oaths and curses. Had not our blessed Lord interceded for him, that his faith might not fail, he, in all probability, would have perished as Judas did^l. In this view, a greater stress is laid on the intercession of Christ than even on his death: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ who died; yea, *rather*, that is risen again, who is even at the right-hand of God, who also *maketh intercession for us^m*." And we are encouraged to believe that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, *seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for usⁿ*." Put then your cause into the Saviour's hands; and beg of him to "pray the Father for you^o," and you cannot but succeed: "for him the Father heareth always^p."]

^e Ps. xciv. 14.

^f Ps. ciii. 17, 18.

^g Ps. cxxxviii. 8.

^h John xiii. 1.

ⁱ Ps. cxliii. 1.

^k 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^l Luke xxii. 31, 32.

^m Rom. viii. 34.

ⁿ Heb. vii. 25.

^o John xiv. 16.

^p John xi. 42.

3. By the honour of God himself—

[God from all eternity entered into covenant with his dear Son in our behalf, engaging, that “if he should make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed, and should prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands^q.” This covenant our blessed Lord has fulfilled on his part, having taken our nature, and “borne our sins in his own body on the tree.” And whilst yet he was upon earth, he made this a ground of his petitions, and a ground also of his expectations, in behalf of his people: “I pray for them,” says he: “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine: and all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world: but these are in the world; and I come to thee. — Holy Father, keep *through thine own name* those whom *thou hast given me*, that they may be one, as we are. *Whilst I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name*: those that thou gavest me have I kept; and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things speak I in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil^r.” Then he adds, what insures to us the completion of his desires, “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me^s.” Now I ask, Is not here abundant ground to expect God’s continued care of his people? May we not from hence “be confident, that He who hath begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ^t?” Yes, surely: and therefore when David, under the influence of unbelief, had entertained a fear, “Will the Lord cast off for ever? will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?” he corrected himself, and with conscious shame exclaimed, “This is my infirmity^u.” We may be sure that God’s covenant shall stand. In the 89th Psalm it is declared, again, and again, and again, in terms the most express that can be imagined^x——— and therefore we may be assured that for his own name and honour sake “he will keep his people by his own power through faith unto salvation^y,” as it was said by Samuel, “The Lord will not forsake his people *for his great name’s sake*, because it hath pleased him to make

^q Isai. liii. 10.^r John xvii. 9—15.^s John xvii. 24.^t Phil. i. 6.^u Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.^x Ps. lxxxix. 28—37.^y 1 Pet. i. 5.

you his people^z." "He is a God that changeth not; and therefore we neither are, nor shall be, consumed^a." We shall be living witnesses for him to all eternity, that "his gifts and calling are without repentance^b."]

APPLICATION—

1. Seek to answer to the character here described—

[If you "know not God," you can have no claim upon him: nor, "unless you be upright in heart," have you any reason to hope that he will ever look upon you with satisfaction. You must "have your hearts right with God," if ever you would be approved of God. Seek, then, to know God as reconciled to you in Christ Jesus — — — and beg of him so to "put truth in your inward parts," that he may acknowledge and commend you as "Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile."]

2. Implore of God the blessing you so greatly need—

[You need it, all of you, and will need it to your dying hour. It is from God that you have received all that you possess. Never would you have known him, if he had not opened the eyes of your understanding, and revealed himself to you^c. And never would your heart have been upright before him, if he, of his own sovereign grace, had not "given you a new heart, and renewed a right spirit within you." It is to Him, then, you must look to carry on the work within you. "No hands but His, who laid the foundation of his spiritual temple within you, can ever finish it^d." "He alone who has been the author of your faith, can ever complete it^e."]

3. Whilst you seek this blessing for yourselves, implore it earnestly for others also—

[So did David, under all his trials; and so should you. It is our privilege and our duty to intercede one for another; parents for their children, and children for their parents; ministers for their people, and people for their ministers. And, O! what happiness should we enjoy in our respective families, and in the Church of God, if we were all partakers of these blessings! It is said, in the very words before my text, "With thee is the fountain of life; and in Thy light shall we see light:" and no doubt, in proportion as the blessings of salvation flow down into our souls, we shall be blessed in ourselves, and blessings to all around us.]

^z 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^a Mal. iii. 6.

^b Rom. xi. 29.

^c Compare Gal. iv. 9. with Phil. iii. 12.

^d Zech. iv. 9.

^e Heb. xii. 2.

DLXIV.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD RECOMMENDED.

Ps. xxxvii. 3—6. *Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass: and he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noon-day.*

IT might be supposed that God, the righteous Governor of the universe, would in this world distinguish his people from his enemies by his visible dispensations towards them: but he does not: he suffers “all things to come alike to all; so that none can discern either love or hatred by all that is before them^a.” This is often a stumbling-block to the righteous, who are apt to be discouraged, when they see the prosperity of the wicked, and are themselves suffering all manner of adversity. David was at one time greatly dejected, or rather, I should say, offended, at this very thing; and was led to imagine that he had served God for nought^b. To guard us against such mistaken views of providence, and against the feelings which they are wont to excite in the breast, he wrote this psalm. That we may not repine at the success of evil-doers, he teaches us to consider, how short their triumph is, and how awful will be their end. He then, in the words of our text, instructs us,

I. What we are to do for God—

It is here taken for granted that we have many difficulties to contend with. But instead of being discouraged by them, our duty to God is,

1. To go on steadily in his service—

[“Trust thou in the Lord, and do good.” It should be an established principle in our hearts, that duty is ours, and events are God’s; and that we should attend to our own concerns, and leave God to his. Now beyond all doubt our great concern is, to prosecute and “finish the work which God has

^a Eccl. ix. 1, 2.

^b Ps. lxxiii. 1—14.

given us to do." We should not merely attend to good works in general, but consider what is that particular "good" which God is calling us to do: perhaps it is to exercise meekness and patience; or perhaps to put forth fortitude and firmness. In the event of persecution for righteousness' sake, these graces must be cultivated with more than ordinary attention, and be called into action in a more than ordinary degree. We are not to be perplexing our minds with inquiries how we may avert the storm which is gathering around us, but be solely careful not to be shaken either in our principles or conduct, or in any respect to dishonour that God whom we profess to serve. Without this fidelity in the path of duty, all trust in God will be a delusion: but, combined with it, our trust in him is a most pleasing and acceptable service.]

2. To seek our happiness in his presence—

[Fidelity itself would not be acceptable, if it proceeded from a principle of slavish fear: we must regard God as a Father, and "delight ourselves in him." It is not a low measure of spirituality that we should aim at; we should aspire after such an enjoyment of God as David himself spake of, when he said, "I will go unto God, my exceeding joy^c." In order to this, we should meditate upon all his glorious perfections, and especially on those perfections as displayed and magnified in the work of redemption. O! what wonders of love and mercy may we see in our incarnate, our redeeming God! In the contemplation of these we should exercise ourselves day and night, till the fire kindle in our bosoms, and we burst forth in acclamations and hosannahs to our adorable Emmanuel. Say, ye who have ever been so occupied, whether such "meditations be not sweet;" and whether "your souls have not been satisfied as with marrow and fatness," when you have been so employed?]

3. To commit our every concern to his disposal—

[Our duty in this respect may not unfitly be illustrated by the confidence which passengers in a ship place in a skilful pilot and an able commander. They trust their persons and their property to the pilot without any anxious cares or painful apprehensions. Conscious of their own incapacity to navigate the ship, they presume not to interfere in the management of the vessel, but leave the whole concern to those whose province it is to conduct it. Whatever storms may arise, they look to him who is at the helm to steer the vessel to its destined port. Thus does the believer commit his way unto the Lord. To God he looks as ordering every thing for his good, yea, as having, if we may so speak, a community of interest with him,

^c Ps. xliiii. 4.

and as pledged to bring him in safety to the harbour where he would be. If any anxious thought arise, he checks it; and “casts all his care on Him, who careth for him.” This we should do in reference to every concern whatever. In relation to temporal things, we should have no more anxiety than the fowls of the air, which subsist from day to day on the bounty of their Creator^d: and even in reference to the soul, the same entire confidence must be placed in God, who has engaged to carry on and perfect in his people the work he has begun^e. Let us not however be misunderstood to say, that we are to put away a *jealous* fear of ourselves: that we must retain even to the end of our lives: but an *unbelieving* fear of God, as either unable or unwilling to save us, we must cast it off with abhorrence, and “be strong in faith, giving glory to God.”]

The promises annexed to these several injunctions shew,

II. What God will do for us—

Truly he will do exceeding abundantly for us above all that we can ask or think—

1. He will supply our wants—

[Great and urgent they may be, even like those with which Israel was oppressed on different occasions in the land of Canaan: but God will interpose for us in the hour of need, so that “verily we shall be fed.” Under the pressure of their troubles, many Jews deserted their own land, and sought for security or plenty among their heathen neighbours: thus they rather fled from trouble, than looked to God, as they should have done, to relieve them from it. We must not act thus: we must not desert our post because of difficulties which we meet with in it; but must expect from God all those supplies of grace and strength which we stand in need of. “He that believeth, will not make haste:” he will not presently despond, because he sees not how his wants are to be supplied; but will remember, that, as “the earth, and the fulness thereof, is the Lord’s,” so there is all fulness of spiritual blessings also treasured up for him in Christ, and he will look to Christ for daily communications, according as his necessities may require. The Lord did not give to Elijah a store of provision that should suffice for months to come, but sent him bread and meat twice a day by the ministration of ravens; and afterwards a daily supply from the widow’s cruse. In the same manner will he impart a sufficiency of temporal and spiritual blessings to all who trust in him; and “according to their day, so their strength shall be.” “The soul that trusts in Him shall want no manner of thing that is good.”]

^d Matt. vi. 25—34.

^e Phil. i. 6.

2. He will fulfil our desires—

[If our desires were after the things of time and sense, we might expect to have them withheld from us: but if they be, as the believer's are, after God himself, we shall never be disappointed: on the contrary, the more earnest and enlarged our desire is, the more certain we are that God will fulfil and satisfy it. The more "wide we open our mouth," the more assured we are that "he will fill it." "He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he also will hear their cry, and will help them." Do we desire increasing "views of his glory? He will put us into the cleft of the rock, and make all his goodness to pass before our eyes^f." Do we desire a more intimate and abiding communion with him? He will "come and dwell in us, and walk in us, and be altogether our God^g." Do we desire a more entire conformity to him? He will "transform us into his image from glory to glory," by the sanctifying influence of his Holy Spirit^h. There shall not be a thing that we can ask, but he will give it us, if only it will be conducive to our spiritual and eternal welfareⁱ.]

3. He will give a happy issue to all our concerns—

[There may be many difficulties in our way, and such as shall be to all appearance insurmountable; but He who made a path through the Red Sea, will remove them all in due time. Whatever in his wisdom he sees to be best for us, "he will bring it to pass." We may labour under many discouragements by reason of calumnies which are circulated respecting us: the world may represent us as enthusiasts that "turn the world upside down," as deceivers that are seeking some base ends of our own, as abettors of sedition, and enemies to civil government; in a word, they may speak of us as "the filth of the earth, and the off-scouring of all things;" but God will not leave us to sink under these reproaches: he will sooner or later appear for us, and "make our righteousness to shine forth as the noon-day." We shall have "good report to pass through, as well as evil report;" and our very demeanour under our persecutions shall carry conviction to the minds of many, that we are indeed the sons of God^k. At all events, if not before, at least at the day of judgment, our reproach shall be rolled away, and "we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father^l."]

REFLECTIONS. See from hence,

1. What they lose who are ignorant of God—

^f Exod. xxxiii. 18—23.

^g 2 Cor. vi. 16. ^h 2 Cor. iii. 18.

ⁱ John xv. 7. and 1 John v. 14, 15. with Ps. xxi. 1, 2.

^k Matt. xxvii. 54.

^l Matt. xiii. 43.

[All that is implied either in the precepts or the promises of our text is altogether unknown to those who experience not the power of religion in their hearts. Whatever burthens they have, are borne upon their own shoulders: they know not what it is to cast them upon the Lord. Hence, when oppressed with heavy trials, they faint and sink under them; and for want of the consolations and supports of religion, they not unfrequently meditate, and sometimes also carry into execution, the awful act of suicide. O that men did but know what provision there is made for them in the Gospel of Christ! In, and with Christ, there is all that we can want, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity — — — Only let us seek to be washed in his blood, to be renewed by his Spirit, and to live altogether by faith on him; and we shall find such rich supplies, such heavenly consolations, such a fulness of all spiritual and eternal blessings, as shall far surpass all that the carnal eye has ever seen, and all that the carnal imagination has ever conceived^m.]

2. What they enjoy who live nigh to God—

[Contemplate the state of those who are now in heaven; how free from care, and how completely happy in the fruition of their God! Such in a measure may our state be even in this present world. Those who believe in Christ are privileged to rejoice in him, yea, and many do “rejoice in him, with joy unspeakable and glorified.” By committing themselves, and all their concerns, to him, “their very *thoughts*, which are naturally as fluctuating as the wind, are establishedⁿ.” O Believers, live not below your privileges: carry every thing to your adorable Saviour, and expect from him all that infinite love can give, and all that Omnipotence can effect. “All things are yours, if ye are Christ’s;” even “death itself, as well as life, is among your treasures^o,” and soon shall all the glory and felicity of heaven be your unalienable and everlasting possession.]

^m 1 Cor. ii. 9.

ⁿ Prov. xvi. 3.

^o 1 Cor. iii. 21—23.

DLXV.

GOD’S INTEREST IN HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. xxxvii. 23, 24. *The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.*

THAT Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, should regard one rather than another amongst the sinners of mankind, appears incredible; and for any one to imagine himself to be amongst those who

are pre-eminently favoured by him, would be judged a height of arrogance, to which scarcely any one of a sound mind could be supposed to have attained. But the Holy Scriptures are extremely clear, and full, and definite upon this point. God does condescend to notice with peculiar kindness those who walk uprightly before him; whilst he beholds with indignation and abhorrence those who, whether openly or in secret, rebel against him. To establish this is the great scope of this psalm, wherein the states of the godly and of the ungodly are contrasted with each other in this respect. From the words which I have just read, we shall necessarily be led to notice,

I. The interest which God takes in his people—

“He orders their steps”—

[In the marginal translation it is said that a good man's steps are “established” by the Lord. The fact is, the Lord so orders them, that they may be established. The very first work of the Lord in his people, is, to bring them to Christ, and to “establish them in Christ^a.” Till this is done, they never take any step that can effectually bring them to heaven — — — When that is done, then they are enabled to “walk in Christ^b,” and, by strength derived from him, to advance in righteousness and true holiness — — —]

“He delights in their ways”—

[True, their ways are far from perfect: and, if God were to be “extreme to mark what is done amiss,” no man living could stand before him. But God looks rather at the *principle* from whence their actions proceed, and at the *end* for which they are done, than at the perfection of the actions themselves; and when he sees that their actions *proceed from love*, and are *done for the glory of his name*, he cannot but feel delight, both in the persons themselves, and in the works they perform; even as a parent delights in the services of a loving and duteous child, not considering so much the excellence of the act as the disposition manifested in the performance of it. On another ground, too, Jehovah delights in the ways of his people, namely, because they are “the fruits of his Spirit” working in them^c. In this view there is not an act that they perform, which is “not pleasing and acceptable in his sight^d” — — —]

“He upholds them with his hand”—

^a John vi. 44, 65. and 2 Cor. i. 21.

^b Col. ii. 6.

^c Gal. v. 22, 23.

^d Heb. xiii. 16. 1 Pet. iii. 4. Phil. i. 11.

[Notwithstanding the grace given unto them, they are yet weak and frail, so that “still in many things they offend^e ;” and, if left to themselves, they would eternally perish. “There is not a just man on earth that liveth and sinneth not^f.” But in this the righteous differ from the wicked, that, notwithstanding they fall, yea, and “fall seven times, they rise again; whilst the wicked, in their falls, are left to perish^g.” The Lord Jesus Christ has engaged for them that “none shall ever pluck them out of his hands^h.” And this is fulfilled to every one of them, insomuch, that “of those whom the Father in his everlasting covenant gave unto his Son, not one ever was, or shall be, lostⁱ.” They all, in their respective generations, are “kept by the power of God through faith unto everlasting salvation^k” — — —]

These truths can never be abused, if we consider, on the other hand,

II. What return he looks for at their hands—

Doubtless it is God who alone can give men “either to will or to do that which is good^l :” but, as the Articles of our Church express it, “He worketh *in* us, that we may will; and then worketh *with* us, when we have that good will.” Though all good proceeds from him, yet he expects a reciprocity on our part.

1. We must cheerfully obey his will—

[We take no step by constraint. We are free agents in all that we do. True it is that God draws us; but he draws us, not as stocks and stones, but “with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love^m.” If we would have our ways pleasing to God, we must seek to please him; and if we would have our “steps ordered and established by him,” we must consult his revealed will, and commit ourselves to the guidance of his Holy Spirit. He has promised, that, in circumstances of difficulty, “we shall hear a word behind us, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it: when we should otherwise be turning to the right hand or to the leftⁿ :” and this promise we must plead in prayer, until, by some way which God shall devise, we see, as it were, the pillar and the cloud going before us, and experience that direction which our necessities require — — —]

2. We must simply depend on his care—

[“It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” A little infant does not more need to be carried in its mother’s

^e Jam. iii. 2.

^f Eccl. vii. 20.

^g Prov. xxiv. 16.

^h John x. 28, 29.

ⁱ John xvii. 12.

^k 1 Pet. i. 5.

^l Phil. ii. 13.

^m Hos. xi. 4.

ⁿ Isai. xxx. 21.

arms than we need the continual support of God. But he promises that "his everlasting arms shall be underneath us^o," and that we shall be "carried as lambs in the bosom of our Lord^p." But in order to this, we must renounce all confidence in our own powers, and say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength^q." If, like Peter, we depend on ourselves, we shall fall: but, if we cry habitually to him, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^r," we shall be strengthened with might by his Spirit in our inward man, and be enabled to "do all things through Christ strengthening us^s." The weaker we are in ourselves, the stronger we shall be in him^t; and, though we be "sifted by Satan" with his utmost efforts^u, "not so much as the smallest grain shall ever fall upon the earth^x." For "it is not the will of our Father that one of his little ones should perish^y."]

ADDRESS,

1. The self-confident and secure—

[Where do *you* find in the Holy Scriptures any one of these promises made to you? Where has God engaged to "order your steps," or declared himself "delighted with your ways?" Or where has he assured you that your falls shall not be unto death? Not one word is there in all the inspired volume that can serve as a foundation of hope to you, whilst you are leaning to your own understanding, or depending on an arm of flesh. On the contrary, there is nothing but perdition denounced against you^z. Beloved Brethren, do but contrast with your condition the states of God's believing and obedient people; and you will see, that they alone are blessed, whose hearts are upright, and "whose God is the Lord."]

2. The fearful and disconsolate—

[Many, under a sense of their great infirmities, are ready to fear, that, notwithstanding all that God has spoken for their encouragement, they shall come short at last. But, if only you really *desire* to please and serve God, see how full and suitable are the promises of God to *you*: "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^a." Are you weak? God says, "I will strengthen you." Are you apprehensive that nothing less than Omnipotence can administer sufficient aid? God adds, "I will help you." Are you still alarmed because there is something yet left for you to do?

^o Deut. xxxiii. 27.

^p Isai. xl. 11.

^q Isai. xlv. 24.

^r Ps. cxix. 117.

^s Phil. iv. 13.

^t 2 Cor. xii. 10.

^u Luke xxii. 31.

^x Amos ix. 9.

^y Matt. xviii. 14.

^z Jer. xvii. 5, 6.

^a Isai. xli. 10.

God adds, I will take the whole matter into my own hands, and "altogether uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness." "Be strong, then, in faith, giving glory to God;" and "you shall not be ashamed or confounded, world without end."]'

DLXVI.

THE SECURITY OF THE UPRIGHT SOUL.

Ps. xxxvii. 31. *The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide.*

THE blessedness of the righteous is a favourite subject with the sweet singer of Israel: several of his psalms are occupied with it throughout; and often in a way of immediate contrast with the state of the ungodly. As far as respects the outward appearance indeed, the advantage is often on the side of the wicked^a: but on a fuller view of their respective states, there will be found the most abundant cause to congratulate the saints even in their lowest condition, so infinitely superior is their lot to that of the most prosperous of ungodly men^b. The ungodly, walking after the imagination of their own hearts, have "their way dark and slippery," so that, sooner or later, they are sure to "fall" and "perish^c:" but the "righteous," having their minds intent upon true wisdom, "are preserved, whilst the seed of the wicked are cut off^d." "The law of God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide."

From these words we shall be led to shew,

I. The character of the righteous—

"The law of God is in his heart." It was not there by nature; for though it was originally inscribed on the heart of Adam in Paradise^e, and traces of it are yet to be found on the hearts even of the benighted heathen^f, yet is it so far effaced from the heart of the natural man, that he neither does nor will yield any subjection to it^g. But,

God has engraven it on his heart—

^a ver. 1. ^b ver. 16. ^c Ps. xxxv. 6—8. with ver. 13—15, 20.

^d ver. 28, 30. ^e Gen. i. 27. ^f Rom. ii. 15. ^g Rom. viii. 7.

[The express promise of God to all who embrace the new covenant is, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts^h.” And this promise he fulfils, through the all-powerful operation of his Holy Spirit upon their souls. As he caused Moses to come up to him on Mount Horeb with tables of stone, on which with his own finger he wrote the law, so he causes the believing penitent to come up to him with his heart of stone; and then, exchanging it for a heart of flesh, he inscribes upon it his law, even, as the Apostle says, upon the fleshy tables of his heartⁱ. We are told respecting all the Lord’s people, that they are “predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ^k:” and in this their conformity to him pre-eminently appears: that, as He could say, “I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea, thy law is within my heart^l,” and as he was typically represented by the ark in which the law was deposited^m, so these have the law treasured up in their souls; and they delight in it, as their ever-faithful monitor, and infallible directoryⁿ. From the time that it is deposited there, they regard it *solely, constantly, and without reserve*. Formerly the opinions of men, or the dictates of flesh and blood, formed their rule of action: now no inquiry is made, but, “What saith the Lord?” — — — Nor is it on great emergencies only that this inquiry is instituted, but at all times and on all occasions — — — Nor are consequences any longer regarded. If a furnace or den of lions be prepared as the recompense of fidelity, he says, “None of these things move me:” I shall “hearken unto none but God” himself — — —]

This forms his distinguishing character—

[Others have the law of God in their *head*, and not unfrequently in their *mouth* also: but he alone has it in his *heart*. There may be amongst the ungodly as comprehensive a knowledge of theology as of any other science, if taken in a mere speculative view: but this is widely different from a spiritual apprehension of God’s law, and a conformity of mind and will to it: *this* pertains to him only who has it written on his heart by the Spirit of God: for so the prophet informs us: “Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, *the people in whose heart is my law*.” To know, in a speculative way, how a sinner is to be made righteous before God, will consist with the grossest impiety: but the having of God’s law in the heart infallibly designates, and proves, us the people of the Lord. There is in this respect the same difference between the nominal and the real Christian as there was formerly between different adherents to the Mosaic law. “All were not Israel who were

^h Jer. xxxi. 33.

ⁱ Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. with 2 Cor. iii. 3.

^k Rom. viii. 29.

^l Ps. xl. 8.

^m Deut. x. 2, 5.

ⁿ Ps. i. 2.

^o Isai. li. 7.

of Israel^p." The proudest Pharisees would "bind the law of God upon their hands, and wear it as frontlets between their eyes:" but the godly alone fulfilled the true intent of that ordinance, by "laying up God's words in their heart and in their soul^q." So now "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly: and circumcision is that of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of man, but of God^r." In other words, he only is truly righteous, who can say with Paul, "I delight in the law of God after my inward man;" and amidst all the temptations of the flesh, "with my mind I serve the law of God^s."]

In connexion with their character, we are led to contemplate,

II. Their security—

"None of their steps shall slide." Of this they may be assured: for a stability is, and shall be, given them, that shall preserve them amidst all temptations; a stability arising,

1. Partly, from the very character which they possess—

["The law of God being in their hearts," *they will not unnecessarily venture themselves in slippery places*. How many fall a prey to the tempter by presuming upon their strength, when, like Joseph, they should rather have fled from the scene of temptation! It is by going fearlessly to the utmost verge of what is lawful, that thousands perish^t. The inquiry of a truly pious soul will be, not, "Is this thing lawful?" but, "Is it expedient also?" and, if the place, or scene, or gratification be calculated, either in itself or in its circumstances, to ensnare his soul, he will keep at a distance from it: for, whilst he is praying daily to God, "Lead us not into temptation," he accounts it folly and impiety to rush unnecessarily into temptation of his own accord. This cautious deportment tends greatly to the preservation of the godly, and to "keep them from defiling their garments" in this polluted world^u.

Moreover, *they are looking to this law to direct their steps*. They "have hid it within their hearts, on purpose that they may not sin against God^x:" but to what purpose have they deposited it there, if they do not consult it? or "wherewith shall they cleanse their way, but by taking heed thereto

^p Rom. ix. 6.

^q Deut. xi. 18.

^r Rom. ii. 28, 29.

^s Rom. vii. 22, 25.

^t 'Licetis perimus omnes' has long been a proverb in the Church.

^u Rev. iii. 4.

^x Ps. cxix. 11.

according to God's word^y?" Whatever then they are solicited to do, they bring it to this touchstone, and try it "by the law and the testimony." If they find not the precept clear, they hesitate: and, if they find not the footsteps of Christ and his Apostles, they pause. They know, that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin^z:" and, till they can see their way clear, and be "thoroughly persuaded in their own mind," they will not proceed^a; lest they lay a stumbling-block in the way of others, and bring guilt upon their own souls^b.

I may add further, that *they will pray unto God to guide them*. They know their privilege: they know that God has said, that, if they call upon him for direction, "they shall hear a word behind them," saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it;" when without such a direction "they would have turned to the right hand or to the left^c." They therefore in every difficulty betake themselves to prayer; and experience the truth of that promise, "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way^d."]

2. Principally, from the care and fidelity of God—

[God has promised that "he will keep the feet of his saints^e," and that "none of their steps shall slide:" and this promise he does, and will, fulfil. He fulfils it to them in a variety of ways. He "takes them, as a mother does her little child, by their hand, and guides them in their way^f:" and, when they are weak, "he strengthens them with might in their inward man^g:" and, when they would otherwise fall, he upholds them with his own almighty arms; agreeably to that express promise which he has given them; "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness^h." Thus is fulfilled that promise which is contained within a few verses of our text, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his handⁱ." We may wonder whence it is that the people of God in all ages have been enabled to maintain their steadfastness in such trying circumstances: but the true reason is to be found in that inviolable engagement which God has entered into, that "they shall hold on their way, and that their hands shall wax stronger and stronger^k:" and this promise he has fulfilled to them, giving them "strength

^y Ps. cxix. 9.

^b 1 Cor. viii. 11—13.

^c 1 Sam. ii. 9.

^d Isai. xli. 10.

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^z Rom. xiv. 23.

^c Isai. xxx. 21.

^f Hos. xi. 3.

ⁱ ver. 23, 24.

X

^a Rom. xiv. 5.

^d Ps. xxv. 9.

^g Eph. iv. 16. Col. i. 11

^k Job xvii. 9.

according to their day¹,” and enabling them “to do all things through his strength communicated to them^m.”]

Hence then we may SEE,

1. Whence it is that so many professors of religion dishonour their high and holy calling—

[It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness are a disgrace to their profession — — And by their falls they bring the very truth of God into disrepute. But whence is it that their walk is so inconsistent? Is it from any want of power or fidelity in God to keep them? No: it arises from this; that they have taken up a profession upon false and insufficient grounds: they have got the law in their *heads*, and in their *mouths*, but have never truly received it into their *hearts*. None will shew more zeal for the tenets they have embraced than they, or talk more fluently respecting them: but they have never been “cast into the mould of the Gospel.” Their sentiments have been altered; but their hearts are unchanged; or, if changed at all, it is only in that they have adopted the *spiritual* lusts of pride and conceit, and false confidence, in the place of the *carnal* lusts of worldliness and uncleanness; or, it may be, they have *added the former to the latter*, affecting only the concealment of former evils, and not the utter extirpation of them. What then is to be expected from such persons, but that they will dishonour their profession? From such roots nothing can be hoped for, but bitter fruits. But let not the blame be cast upon religion. “They have a name to live, but they are dead.” If ever they had received the law of God into their hearts, it would have produced its due effect upon their lives; and not upon the outward deportment only, but on every temper and disposition of their minds. Religion is, and must be, the same in all ages: if it transformed the saints of other days into the image of their God in righteousness and true holiness, it will do so still: and, if the conduct of any who profess it be unworthy of their high calling, let the blame attach where it ought, not on religion, but on those who make a hypocritical profession of it. Only let the law be in the heart, and we have no fear of the fruits that will appear in the life.]

2. How inseparable is the union between duty and privilege—

[The self-depending formalist who dreads the mention of privilege, and the Antinomian professor who hates the mention of duty, are equally remote from the truth of God. Depend on God we must; for it is He who must work all our works in us. And obey His law we must: for “without holiness no man

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

^m Phil. iv. 13.

shall see the Lord." Neither can supersede the other. To the Antinomian then I say, "Let the word of God abide in you; and let it dwell in you richly in all wisdom." And to the formalist I say, Look unto God to begin, and carry on, the whole work of grace in your hearts; for without Him you can do nothing. Let both of you know, that both confidence in God, and obedience to Him, are necessary: it is only by a reliance on Him that you can obtain strength for obedience; and it is only by obedience that you can prove the sincerity of your faith and love. But whilst to those who would lean to either extreme I would say, "What God has joined, let no man put asunder," I would most affectionately encourage the true Christian to expect all that God has promised. Your difficulties may be great, and your conflicts severe; but "your Redeemer is mighty;" and He who bought you with his blood, regards you as his purchased possession, and will suffer "none to pluck you out of his hands." He has promised to carry on and perfect his work in your hearts; and what he has promised, he is able also to perform. Only be careful to know and do his will; and He will bear you up in his everlasting arms, and "preserve you blameless to his heavenly kingdom."]

DLXVII.

DAVID'S DISTRESS AND CONSOLATION.

Ps. xxxviii. 1—9. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure: for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble, and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.*

IT will be of great use to us through life to treasure up in our minds the dealings of God with us on some particular occasions. As his care over us in our difficulties may well call for "a stone of remembrance, which shall be called our Eben-ezer," so his merciful attention to us at the first commencement of our humiliation before him may well be written in

indelible characters upon our hearts. The Prophet Jeremiah, looking back to some season of peculiar distress, records his experience in terms of lively gratitude^a: and, in like manner, David opens to us all his views and feelings when he sought the Lord after a season of darkness and distress; and he tells us that this psalm was written by him “to bring to remembrance” the troubles he then endured, and the tender mercies of God towards him.

From the part we have just read, we shall be led to consider,

I. His distress—

This was exceeding great.—Let us notice,

1. The source and cause of it—

[He traces it to sin as its proper cause^b: and sin is the true and only source of all trouble — — — Sin is an object of God’s abhorrence; and wherever it exists unlamented and dominant, he will visit it according to its desert. In whomsoever it be found, whether he be a king on his throne, or a beggar on a dunghill, he will make no difference, except indeed to punish it in proportion to the light that has been resisted, and the aggravations with which it has been committed. Doubtless the sins of David were of most transcendent enormity, and therefore might well be visited with peculiar severity: but we must not imagine that his are the only crimes that deserve punishment: disobedience to God, whether against the first or second table of the Law, is hateful in his sight, and will surely subject us to his “hot displeasure” — — —]

2. The extent and depth of it—

[His *soul* was overwhelmed with a sense of God’s wrath. “God’s arrows” pierced his inmost soul: and his hand was heavy upon him, and “pressed him sore.” His iniquities, which, when they were yet only committed in desire and purpose, appeared light, now were an insupportable burthen to his soul; insomuch that “he roared by reason of the disquietness of his heart.” Here then we see what sinners may expect in this life. Verily such experience as this is little else than a foretaste of hell itself — — —]

But his *body* also was afflicted with a grievous disease, which had been sent of God as an additional mark of his righteous indignation^c. And no doubt, if we could certainly discover the reasons of the Divine procedure, we should often see

^a Lam. iii. 1—4, 12, 13, 17—21. ^b ver. 3, 4, 5. ^c ver. 3, 5, 7.

diseases and death inflicted as the chastisement of sin^d. David viewed his disorders in this light: and those, without any additional load, were heavy to be borne; but, when added to the overwhelming troubles of his soul, they almost sunk him to despair. Let those who think lightly of sin, view this monarch in the state above described, and say, whether sin, however "sweet in the mouth, be not at last the gall of asps within us^e:" yes, assuredly, it will sooner or later "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder."]

But in the midst of all this trouble, he makes mention of,

II. His consolation—

Whilst deeply bemoaning his sin, he was assured that God was privy to all the workings of his soul, beholding his desires, and hearing all his groans. Now this was a great consolation to him, because he well knew,

1. That God, in the groanings of a penitent, recognizes the voice of his own eternal Spirit—

[Groans are the natural expressions of inward pain and anguish; and when they arise from a sense of sin, they are indications of a penitent heart. But no pious disposition is found in man till it is planted there by the Holy Ghost. God is "the Author of every good and perfect gift," and must "give us to will, no less than to do" whatever is acceptable in his sight. As for groanings on account of sin, they are more especially said to be the fruits of the Spirit, who thus "helpeth our infirmities, and enables us to express those feelings which are too big for utterance^f." To *man* such inarticulate sounds would convey no distinct idea; but *God* understands them perfectly, because "he knoweth the mind of the Spirit:" and he delights in them, because it is in this way that "the Spirit maketh intercession for us," and because these very intercessions are "according to the will of God^g."

What a consolatory thought is this to one that is overwhelmed with a sense of sin! "He knows not what to pray for as he ought;" and perhaps the load upon his spirit disables him for uttering what his unembarrassed judgment would dictate: but he recollects that God needeth not any one to interpret to him our desires: he understands a sigh, a tear, a look, with infallible certainty: he sees all the self-loathing and self-abhorrence that is contained in such expressions of the penitent's feelings;

^d 1 Cor. xi. 30.

^f Rom. viii. 26.

^e Job xx. 12—14.

^g Rom. viii. 27.

and in answer to them, he will “do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.”]

2. That to such expressions of penitence all the promises of God are made—

[It is not to the fluent tongue, but to the contrite heart, that pardon and peace are promised. “To this man will I look,” says God, “even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit,” “to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones^h.” “He will fulfil, not the requests only, but the *desire* also, of them that fear him,” and “of them that *hope* in his mercy.” If only we *look* unto him we shall be lightened,” yea, we shall be saved with an everlasting salvationⁱ.” The publican who dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote on his breast, and cried, God be merciful to me a sinner! went down to his house justified, when the self-applauding Pharisee was dismissed under the guilt of all his sins.

Now this is an unspeakable consolation to the weary and heavy-laden sinner. Had he to look for grounds of worthiness, or even for any considerable attainments, in himself, he would be discouraged; but finding that the invitations of God are made to him as wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and that the promises are suited to him *in that state*, he comes to the Lord Jesus Christ, and finds rest and peace unto his soul.]

From this view of the Psalmist’s experience we see,

1. What an evil and bitter thing sin is—

[“Fools will make a mock at sin,” and represent it as a light and venial thing: but let any one look at David in the midst of all the splendour of a court, and say, what sin is, which could so rob him of all earthly pleasure, and bring such torment upon his soul. Was that a light matter? If we will not be convinced by such a sight as this, we shall learn it by sad experience in the eternal world, where the worm that will prey upon our consciences shall never die, and the fire that shall torment our bodies shall never be quenched. O that we might be instructed, ere it be too late!]

2. What an enviable character is the true Christian, even when viewed under the greatest disadvantages—

[We cannot conceive a Christian in circumstances less enviable than those of David in the passage before us: yet compare him with an ungodly or impenitent man under the most favourable circumstances that can be imagined, and ask, Whose views are most just? — — — Whose feelings most

^h Isai. lviii. 15. and lxvi. 2. ⁱ Ps. ciii. 17, 19, 20. Isai. xlv. 17, 22

rational? ——— Whose prospects most happy? ——— With the one “God is angry every day;” on the other he looks with complacency and delight: the joys of the one will soon terminate in inconceivable and everlasting misery; and the sorrows of the other in endless and unspeakable felicity^k. The sinner in the midst of all his revellings has an inward witness of the truth of our Lord’s assertion; “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”]

3. Of what importance it is to attain just views of the character of God—

[If God be viewed merely as a God of all mercy, we shall never repent us of our sins: and if he be viewed as an inexorable Judge, we shall be equally kept from penitence by despair. But let him be seen as he is in Christ Jesus, a “God reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them,” let him be acknowledged as “a just God and yet a Saviour,” and instantly will a holy fear spring up in the place of presumption, and hope dispel the baneful influence of despondency.

Know then, Beloved, that this is the very character of God as he is revealed in his Gospel: he is “just, and yet the justifier of them that believe in Jesus;” he is to the impenitent indeed “a consuming fire:” but, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Let the groaning penitent then look up to him with cheerful hope; yea, with assured confidence, that God will not despise even the lowest expressions of penitential sorrow: however “bruised the reed may be, the Lord Jesus will not break it; nor will he quench the smoking flax,” though there be in it but one spark of grace, and a whole cloud of corruption: never did he yet “despise the day of small things;” “nor will he ever cast out the least or meanest that come unto him.” Only come to him in faith, and “according to your faith it shall be done unto you.”]

^k Luke xvi. 19—26. and Isai. xxxv. 10.

DLXVIII.

THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Ps. xxxix. 4, 5. *Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an hand-breadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee! verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.*

THERE is nothing more painful to a pious mind than to see how generally religion is neglected and

despised. A godly man delights to speak of the things which are nearest to his heart: but he is often constrained to be silent, lest he should only induce the persons whose welfare he would promote, to blaspheme God, and to increase thereby their own guilt and condemnation. Gladly would he benefit all around him: but in many cases he perceives, that the very attempt to do so would be to "cast pearls before swine." In tenderness to them therefore, as well as from a regard to his own feelings, he imposes a restraint upon himself in their presence, and "refrains even from good words," though it is a pain and a grief to him to do so. Such was David's situation when he penned this psalm. He was grieved to think that rational and immortal beings, standing on the very verge of eternity, should act so irrational a part: and not finding vent for his feelings amongst men, he poured them out before God in the words which we have just read; and intreated, that, however careless others were about the concerns of eternity, he might be more deeply and abidingly impressed with them.

Wishing that your minds may be suitably affected with this all-important subject, I will set before you,

I. David's estimate of man's present state—

He acknowledges that he himself could form but a very inadequate notion respecting it—

[Speculatively indeed he knew well enough, that man's days are but few at all events, and quite uncertain as to their continuance: but the deep, and practical, and influential sense of it he had not in any degree equal to its importance; nor could he impress it on his own soul, without the powerful assistance of God's Holy Spirit. Hence he poured forth this earnest petition to his God, "Lord, make me to know my end! make me to know how frail I am!"

It is thus with us also. Speculatively, the most ignorant amongst us has as perfect a knowledge of the subject as the most learned: but, practically, no one knows it, unless he have been taught of God: and even those who have "heard and learned it of the Father," need to be taught it more deeply from day to day.

That *children* do not reflect upon it, we do not wonder, because of the vanity of their minds, and their almost entire

want of serious consideration. But when *persons* are *grown to maturity*, we might well expect them to feel so obvious a truth. They see that multitudes are cut off at their age; and they know that with the termination of the present life all opportunities of preparing for eternity must cease: yet they not only do not lay these considerations to heart, but they will not hear of them, or endure to have them presented to their view. Nor are *those who are more advanced in life* at all more thoughtful on this subject. Engaged in worldly business, and occupied in providing for their families, they put the thoughts of eternity as far from them as they did amidst the more pleasurable pursuits of youth. And even *when they attain to old age*, they are as far from realizing the expectations of death and judgment as ever. They know, in a speculative way, that they are nearer to the grave than they were in early life, and that they may at no distant period expect a change. But still these views are no more influential on their minds than they were at any former period of their lives. A condemned criminal, who has but a few days to live, *feels* that every hour brings him nearer to the time appointed for his execution: but not so the man who is bowed down with years: the very habit of living puts at an indefinite distance the hour of death; and days and months pass on without ever bringing at all nearer to his apprehensions the time of his dissolution. Even *the sick* labour under the same mental blindness. They attend to the fluctuations of their disorder; and one single symptom of convalescence does more to remove the expectation of death from them, than many proofs of augmented debility do to bring it home to their feelings with suitable apprehensions: they are still buoyed up with hopes from the skill of their medical attendant, when all around them see that they are sinking fast into the grave. Whatever be a man's age or state, it is God, and God alone, that can "make him thoroughly to know and feel how frail he is."]

Nevertheless the view here given us is truly just—

[The life of man is so short, as to be really "nothing before God." The comparison of it to "an hand-breadth" is peculiarly deserving of our attention; because by that image every man has, placed as it were before his eyes, "the measure of his days:" he cannot look upon his hand without calling to mind how frail he is, and how soon his present state of existence must come to an end. Let him divide his life into the periods of youth, manhood, and old age; and let him in his own apprehension divide his measure also; and it will bring to his imagination, in a very forcible way, the truth which he is so backward to contemplate. A great variety of other images are used in Scripture to convey this truth: life is compared to

a shuttle which flies quickly through the loom^a: to a ship, which soon passes away, and leaves no trace behind it: to an eagle, which, with the rapidity of lightning, hasteth to its prey^b: but the image in our text is more striking than them all; because, whilst it is peculiarly simple, it is also practical, embodied, portable. Not that any image is sufficient to paint the shortness and uncertainty of life in its true colours; for “before God, with whom one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day^c,” it is absolutely “as nothing.”

As far as words can describe the state of man, truly the Psalmist has done it in our text. “*Man* is vanity;” not only vain, but *vanity itself*. “*Every man*” is so: not only the poor and ignorant, but the rich and learned: as it is said, “Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie: to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity^d.” And this they are “*in their best state*;” even in the vigour of youth, and in the midst of all the pleasures and honours that their hearts can wish. And they are so “*altogether*,” both in mind and body; for their body is “crushed before the moth;” and in respect of mind, they are, *as far as spiritual things are concerned*, “like the wild ass’s colt.” This description may appear exaggerated: but it is true: yes, “*verily*,” things are so, whether we will believe it or not: and if any deny it, our answer is, “Let God be true; but every man a liar.”]

Such being the real state of man, I will endeavour to shew you,

II. The vast importance of being duly impressed with it—

It was the want of this knowledge that made the adversaries of David so proud and contemptuous: and it was from a conviction of these truths that David was led so deeply to bewail their infatuation. A due consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of life would be of infinite service,

1. To diminish our anxieties about the things of time—

[We should think but little of our pleasures, or riches, or honours, if we considered how short a time they would continue, and that they may all vanish, together with life itself, the very next hour. Examples in abundance there are, in every age and place, to shew the extreme vanity of all that the world calls good and great. It is not in the Bible only that

^a Job vii. 6, 7. ^b Job ix. 25, 26. ^c 2 Pet. iii. 8. ^d Ps. lxii. 8.

we see those who promised themselves years wherein to enjoy their newly-acquired wealth, cut short, and called in an instant to their great account: we see it continually before our eyes: the messenger of death is sent to many, who think of their end as little as any of us can do; and the sentence, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," is executed without any previous notice or expectation. If it be thought that still, if not in their own persons, yet in their heirs, they enjoy the things for which they have laboured; I answer, that they are often deprived of those very heirs, on whose aggrandizement they had set their hearts; and are constrained to leave their wealth to others who are comparatively strangers to them. Moreover, supposing their destined heir to succeed to their wealth, they little know what effect it may have upon him, and whether he may not dissipate it all in a tenth part of the time that it took them to amass it. Solomon mentions this as a very great drawback upon human happiness: "I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun; because I should leave it to the man that shall be after me; and who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewn myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity^e." It is probable that Solomon saw how weak his son Rehoboam was: and certainly, of all the instances that ever occurred of the vanity of human grandeur, this is the greatest: for Solomon's head was scarcely laid in the grave, before ten of the tribes out of the twelve revolted from his son, and, instead of being his subjects, became his rivals and enemies^f: and *in the space of five years* afterwards, all the treasures, with which Solomon had enriched both his own house and the temple of the Lord, were taken away by an invading enemy; and *brazen* shields were made by his son to replace the *golden* shields with which the temple had been adorned^g. How strongly does this illustrate those words of David which immediately follow my text! "Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." Assuredly, all our feelings, whether of hope or fear, whether of joy or sorrow, whether for ourselves or others, would be moderated, if only the thought of the transitoriness and uncertainty of human affairs were once duly impressed upon our minds: "those who have wives, would be as though they had none; those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; those who buy, as though they bought not: and those who use this world, as not abusing it:" the one thought, I say, how "transient every thing in

^e Eccles. ii. 18, 19. ^f 1 Kings xii. 16, 19. ^g 1 Kings xiv. 25—27.

this world is," would produce in us, if not an indifference to the concerns of time, yet at least a moderation in our regard for them^h.]

2. To augment our diligence in preparing for eternity—

[Who that considered the uncertainty of life, would defer the concerns of his soul, which are of more importance than ten thousand worlds! It were rather to be expected that such an one would give neither sleep to his eyes nor slumber to his eyelids, till he should have secured, beyond a possibility of doubt, the favour of his God. One would think that every hour spent in any other pursuit should be grudged by him; and that, whatever efforts were made to divert his attention to any other subject, he should say with Nehemiah, "I am doing a great work, and cannot come downⁱ." With what care, under such impressions, would a person read the word of God! With what humility would he attend divine ordinances! With what strong crying and tears would he present his supplications at the throne of grace! How, in all that he did, would he resemble those who contended in the Olympic games, running, wrestling, fighting as for their very life! The man with the avenger of blood close at his heels would not exert himself more to reach the city of refuge, than such a one would in "fleeing from the wrath to come." It is only those who promise themselves days and months to come, that can sleep at their post, and dream of more convenient seasons, which may never arrive^k — — —

In this view then I cannot too earnestly entreat you to offer, each of you for yourselves, the prayer of David, "Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am!" — — — And I beseech you to get his estimate of human life so graven on your hearts, that you may walk under the influence of it to the latest hour of your lives. In a word, My heart's desire and prayer to God for every one of you is, that you may be so "wise as to redeem your time," and be so taught to number your days as to apply your hearts unto wisdom^l.]

^h 1 Cor. vii. 29—31.

ⁱ Neh. vi. 3.

^k Jam. iv. 13, 14.

^l Ps. xc. 12.

DLXIX.

DAVID'S SUCCESS IN PRAYER AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO US.

Ps. xl. 1—3. *I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a*

rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord.

THIS psalm undoubtedly refers to Christ, being expressly applied to him by an inspired Apostle; and so applied, as to have the whole weight of the Apostle's argument depending on the truth and propriety of his citation^a. Yet it certainly refers to David also, who, in some parts of it, speaks in his own person, and, in others, in the person of the Messiah. It is in this way that the prophetic writings generally speak: there will be found in them a primary or historical sense, and a secondary or mystical sense; the two senses being sometimes more blended, and sometimes more distinct. Here, as in several other psalms, some parts of the psalm are more applicable to David, and others to the Messiah. To David, we conceive, the words which we have just read more immediately belong: and, as spoken by him in his own name, they will lead me to set before you,

I. His conduct in a season of deep distress—

What the particular distress was, we are not informed. Sometimes the language which he here uses has respect to sufferings under persecution. Thus in the 69th Psalm he says, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters^b." Again, in the 142d Psalm; "Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I: bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name^c." But in the psalm before us, he speaks more particularly as under the pressure of sin: "Innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me^d." On this account I understand

^a Heb. x. 4—9.

^b Ps. lxi. 1, 2, 14.

^c Ps. cxlii. 6, 7.

^d ver. 12.

his distress to have arisen chiefly on account of sin, under a sense of which,

1. He “waited patiently *upon* the Lord”—

[He betook himself to prayer. And where should a weary and heavy-laden sinner go, but unto his God; or how should he approach his God, but in a way of humble, fervent, and continual supplication? In what manner he prayed, he tells us in another psalm: “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice; let thine ear be attentive to the voice of my supplication! If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord; my soul doth wait; and in his word do I hope^e.” He was not like those who “pour out a prayer only when God’s chastening is upon them:” he would call upon his God day and night; and never cease to wrestle with him, till he had prevailed^f.]

2. He “waited patiently *for* the Lord”—

[He well knew how often he had turned a deaf ear to the voice of God; and therefore, how justly God might turn a deaf ear to him. Yet he hoped in the multitude of God’s tender mercies. He came not pleading any merits of his own, nor trusting in any outward services whatever: he knew that God required not the sacrifice of bulls and of goats to expiate sin, but faith in that better sacrifice which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world; and he came pleading the merit of *that* sacrifice, and trusting that *through* it he should ultimately find acceptance^g. However long therefore God should withhold an answer of peace, he would wait, and patiently too, without murmuring; satisfied, if, after ever so many years of continued supplication, God should at last say to him, “Fear not; thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee.”]

The wisdom of this conduct may be seen in,

II. The benefit he derived from it—

God “inclined his ear to him, and heard his cry;” and, in answer to his supplications, vouchsafed to him,

1. Liberty—

[The image under which David depicts his unpardoned state is very beautiful and just. He was as one in “an horrible pit, and sunk in miry clay.” Say, ye who know what it is to be shut up, as it were, under a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of God’s wrath, whether any words can adequately describe the darkness, the misery, and the bondage of a soul

^e Ps. cxxx. 1—5. See also Ps. xxxviii. 1—6.

^f Gen. xxxii. 26. Hos. xii. 3, 4.

^g ver. 6—11.

so circumstanced? The state of Jeremiah, when cast into a dungeon, and sunk in the mire, and ready to perish with hunger^h, was distressing to flesh and blood: but what was that to a sinner shut up in hourly expectation of the wrath of an offended God? Oh! it is inexpressibly tremendous: no tongue can tell how a soul trembles, and sinks, and faints under such appalling apprehensions, as are called by the Apostle, “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume it” — — — But from this state David was delivered by means of fervent and persevering prayer. Who will say that he was not well repaid for waiting, for waiting patiently *upon* the Lord, and *for* the Lord? Had his supplications been unintermitted for ten thousand years, they would have been well compensated by such an answer as this at last. And, if a promise of such an answer after such a period were given to any one that is now gone beyond redemption, we may well conceive with what ardour he would commence, and prosecute his labour through the appointed time: the very hope of deliverance at last would more than half annihilate the anguish with which despair has already overwhelmed his soul.]

2. Holiness—

[When God, by a sense of pardoning love, “brought David up out of an horrible pit, and out of the miry clay,” he at the same time “set his feet upon a rock, and established his goings.” What that rock was, we are at no loss to determine: it was no other than “the Rock of Ages,” the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “a sure foundation” to all who stand upon himⁱ, and who will impart of his own stability to all who put their trust in him. “On this Rock the whole Church is built; nor shall the gates of hell prevail against it^k.” It is not pardon only that we obtain by union with the Lord Jesus Christ, but strength also, to walk steadfastly in the ways of God. Separate from him, we can do nothing^l: united to him by faith, we can do all things^m: and so established shall our hearts be by his grace, that we may defy all the powers of darkness, and already, by anticipation, enjoy our final triumphⁿ.” What a fruit then was here of persevering prayer! Yet so shall all who wait patiently upon their God be favoured: they shall be “turned from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”]

3. Joy—

[“A new song was now put into the mouth of David, even praise unto his God.” And praise is indeed a “new” song to one who is but just brought to peace with God through

^h Jer. xxxviii. 6, 9, 10.

ⁱ Isai. xxviii. 15.

^k Matt. xvi. 18.

^l John xv. 5.

^m Phil. iv. 13.

ⁿ Zech. iv. 7. Isai. xli. 14—16. Rom. viii. 35—39.

our Lord Jesus Christ: the unconverted man knows it not: he has not a heart attuned to it. He may feel somewhat of gratitude for temporal mercies; but for the communication of spiritual blessings he cannot render any cordial thanks, because he never has received them, nor ever felt his need of them. Jeremiah might be sensible of his obligations to Ebed-melech for deliverance from the dungeon, because he had a deep consciousness of the peril and misery from which he had been rescued: but without that consciousness all professions of gratitude for such a deliverance would have been absurd. And so, till we are sensible what a horrible pit we have been taken out of, we can never have our mouth filled with praises and thanksgivings to our redeeming God. But this ardent love to God and holy delight in him invariably spring out of a manifestation of God's mercy to the soul. David would praise his God every day, and all the day long: and it should seem that the greatness and the multitude of the deliverances vouchsafed to him, disposed him, beyond all other of the sons of men, to pour out his soul in acclamations and hosannahs to his God.]

What then is,

III. The improvement we should make of his experience—

St. Paul tells us, that the mercy vouchsafed to him was intended by God for the instruction and encouragement of others; for their instruction—that they might know how great was the long-suffering of God; and for their encouragement—that they, from so glorious an example of mercy, might learn to expect the same. Thus David, speaking of this experience of his, says, “Many shall see it, and fear, and shall put their trust in the Lord.” From his experience then we may learn,

1. To use the same means—

[We are not to say, David found mercy of the Lord, therefore I may expect the same at all events; but, therefore I may expect the same in a diligent use of the same means. David feared; and therefore I must “fear:” I must fear the displeasure of my God: I must fear lest I be left in the horrible pit, and sink for ever in the mire of unforgiven sin. My fear also must be operative, stirring me up to earnest prayer, and stimulating me to “flee for refuge to the hope that is set before me.” The use we are apt to make of any extraordinary displays of mercy, and which many make of the mercy vouchsafed to the penitent thief upon the cross, is to say within ourselves, God is too merciful to punish men in the eternal

world: if I in a dying hour do but ask forgiveness, I also shall obtain mercy: and therefore I will not trouble myself about turning unto God, till I find, or think I find, that death is coming upon me. But let not any of us be guilty of so perverting the mercies of our God: let us “not so despise his goodness and patience and long-suffering; but let his goodness lead us to repentance.” Let us say, David found deliverance by waiting patiently. I then will wait patiently also. But it was with strong crying and tears that David sought for mercy: and in that way I will seek it also. It was in these holy exercises too that he was so constant: and in them also will I be constant, and persevere unto the end, assured, that it is only by patient continuance in well-doing I can ever hope to obtain the desired benefits.]

2. To expect the same end—

[We should never imagine ourselves to be in so low a state, but that God is able to deliver us from it. If, like Jonah, we were, as to our own apprehensions, “in the belly of hell,” yet from thence we should cry to him, assured that he would hear our voice, and “bring up our souls from the pit of corruption^o.” The state of David was as desperate as it could well be: yet from thence was he rescued, to his unutterable joy. Hezekiah also seems to have been in a similar state, and to have experienced a similar deliverance: “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back^p.” Thus shall it be with all who will seek God in sincerity and truth, especially when, like David, they seek him through the sacrifice and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their feet shall then be extricated from the mire, and set upon the Rock, where “their feet shall not slide,” and from whence “they shall never be moved.” And though their lives hitherto may have been spent in sighing and mourning, yet shall there be given to them “the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” In a word, let them only pray in faith; and however “wide they open their mouth, it shall be filled^q.”]

^o Jonah ii. 2, 6.

^p Isai. xxxviii. 17.

^q Ps. lxxxix. 10.

DLXX.

CHRIST A PREACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Ps. xl. 9, 10. *I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: Lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart: I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.*

SOME of the most important prophecies are introduced in such a way as clearly to shew, that the writers of them were overruled, as it were, by a divine impulse, to speak things which they themselves did not understand. This was certainly the case with Caiaphas, who, being the High Priest, was moved by God to utter words, of the true import of which he had not the slightest conception^a. I think it highly probable, also, that David in this psalm had no just comprehension of the prophecy before us. The beginning of the psalm and the end of it seem to belong to David only: but here is a passage which can have no reference to him, and can be interpreted of Christ alone. To him it is applied in the Epistle to the Hebrews; the writer of which, shewing the utter inefficacy of the legal sacrifices to take away sin, refers to this psalm in confirmation of his statement; and *argues from it*, that God in this very passage had declared his determination to “remove” the shadowy institutions of the law, and to “establish” that which was revealed in the Gospel, even “that one offering of Christ Jesus, whereby the whole world may be sanctified and saved^b.”

The words of my text stand in immediate connexion with those cited by the Apostle: and they declare what Christ should do in his *prophetic* office: that as, in the capacity of our great High Priest, he should offer himself a sacrifice for our sins, so, in the capacity of a Prophet to his Church, he should “preach righteousness and salvation” to the whole world.

In this view of the passage, I shall be led to consider it as fulfilled,

I. In the ministry of Christ himself—

Our blessed Lord did not, indeed, open the truths of the Gospel so fully as his Apostles did after his resurrection: for, till after his death and resurrection, the people were not prepared to receive a full communication of all which he was commissioned to

^a John xi. 49—52.

^b Heb. x. 4—10.

reveal. He told his hearers, that “he had many things to say unto them; but that they could not bear them then^c.” Yet did he so far unfold the mystery of godliness to his hearers, that all future revelations of it should evidently appear to be only a continuation and enlargement of the same divine testimony.

1. He traced salvation to *its source*, the love of God the Father^d — — —

2. He referred to his own sufferings as *the means* whereby it was to be accomplished^e — — —

3. He displayed it in all *its glorious effects*, the glory of God, and the salvation of man^f — — —

Nor could any consideration whatever induce him to conceal within his own bosom any one truth which he was commissioned to declare.

[He could appeal to the heart-searching God, “I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest.” In every part of his ministry “he witnessed a good confession^g :” and, at the close of it, gave the most explicit directions relative to the truths that should be proclaimed by all the ministers of his word^h.]

This passage is fulfilled yet further,

II. In the ministry of all his faithful servants—

St. Peter unfolded this great salvation both to Jewsⁱ and Gentiles^k — — — St. Paul determined to know nothing amongst his people, “save Jesus Christ and him crucified^l” — — —

And we also can *appeal to God* that we, according to our ability, have followed his steps, “not shunning to declare unto you all the counsel of God^m — — —

^c John xvi. 12.

^d John iii. 16.

^e Matt. xx. 28. and xxvi. 26—28.

^f John xii. 28, 32. He opened it fully, under the images of the bread of life, John vi. 35, 47—51. and iv. 13, 14. as also under other images, John xi. 25, 26. and xiv. 6.

^g 1 Tim. vi. 13.

^h Luke xxiv. 46, 47.

ⁱ Acts ii. 36. and iii. 16, 19. and iv. 10—12. and v. 30, 31. and xiii. 38, 39.

^k Acts x. 43.

^l 1 Cor. ii. 2.

^m Acts xx. 27. Here the different expressions of the text may be dwelt upon to advantage.

Let me then INQUIRE,

1. What know you of this subject ?

[It is surprising how ignorant of this great salvation many are, even after it has been preached to them faithfully for many years. But the truth is, men do not meditate on what they hear, or pray to God to impress it on their minds by his Holy Spirit: and hence, the word, like seed sown by the way-side, is taken away from their hearts, and either never springs up at all, or springs only to wither immediately for want of either root or moisture. But, my dear Brethren, you must give account to God of all that you hear, as I also must of all that I preach: and I pray God, that I may so speak, and you hear, that we may “give up our account together, with joy, and not with grief” — — —]

2. What effect has it produced upon you ?

[The use of the Gospel is to bring us unto Christ, and to assimilate us to his divine image. If, then, we receive it aright, we shall be able to say with Christ, “I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy Law is within my heartⁿ.” And, as Christ hid not God’s righteousness within his heart, but proclaimed it boldly “to the great congregation,” so must you, Brethren, before the whole world be ready to confess Christ, and to follow him faithfully, even unto death. You must not only “cleave to him with full purpose of heart^o,” but must “glory in his cross, and by means of it be crucified unto the world, and have the world crucified unto you^p.” Let me then ask, Is it thus with your souls? Oh, “let there be in you the mind that was in Christ Jesus^q!” So shall you partake with him in all the glory and felicity which the Father has conferred upon him^r, and which he also is empowered to bestow on all his faithful followers^s.]

ⁿ ver. 8.

^o Acts xi. 23.

^p Gal. vi. 14.

^q Phil. ii. 5.

^r Phil. ii. 9.

^s Luke xxii. 29. Rev. iii. 21.

DLXXI.

CONSOLATION TO THE DISTRESSED.

Ps. xl. 17. *I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.*

THAT part of the Holy Scriptures which most fully opens the exercises of the heart is the book of Psalms. There we see a man of God unbosoming himself before his Maker, and declaring all his hopes and fears, his griefs and consolations. Sometimes he speaks in the person of the Messiah, and sometimes in his own person: sometimes his words are appli-

cable both to the one and the other. These varieties often appear in the very same psalm; some parts of which exclusively relate to the type, or to the anti-type; and other parts are common to both. It is thus in the psalm before us. That it refers to the Messiah, there can be no doubt; because it is applied to him by God himself^a. Yet there are in it some expressions, which should rather be explained in reference to David only. The twelfth verse in particular must be understood in this way: and the circumstance of all the following verses being repeated in another place, and formed into a distinct psalm by themselves^b, is a strong reason for referring them also to him principally, or perhaps to him alone. In the words of our text we notice,

I. His complaint—

David on some occasions was reduced to great straits and difficulties with respect to his temporal concerns: but he was also much tried in his spirit: and the complaint before us seems to have arisen from,

1. A sense of his guilt—

[In ver. 12, he speaks of “his iniquities having taken such hold upon him, that he was not able to look up; that they were more than the hairs of his head, so that his heart failed him.” It is very probable that he alluded in some measure to those dreadful enormities which he had committed in the matter of Uriah. But he would not consider those actions merely as insulated and detached, but rather as indications of the extreme depravity of his heart^c: and in reference to *that* he might well say of himself, “I am poor and needy.” Indeed, who that knows any thing of the spirituality of God’s law, or of his own immediate departures from it, can use any other language than that in the text? Was Adam poor when despoiled of the Divine image through the commission of one sin; and are not we, whose iniquities are more in number than the hairs of our head? Was he needy, when banished from Paradise, and doomed to eternal death; and are not we, who from our very birth have been “treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath?” Though God has forgiven us, it does not become us to forget what we are in ourselves, but to go softly before him all our days, repenting in dust and ashes.]

^a Compare ver. 6—8. with Heb. x. 5—7.

^b Ps. lxx. ^c In this light he speaks of them in Ps. li. 5.

2. A sense of his weakness—

[David had other enemies than those who opposed his regal authority. He complains in another psalm, “Iniquities prevail against me^d,” and he found it exceeding difficult to subdue them. On this account also he used the expressions in the text. He felt himself poor and needy in-reference to every thing that he accounted good. He lamented especially his want of wisdom, and strength, and righteousness. Hence he cried, “Open thou mine eyes;” “O give me understanding in the way of godliness!” “Hold thou me up!” “hold up my goings in thy ways, that my footsteps slip not!” “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord! for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Similar to this is the experience of all the saints. All are insufficient of themselves for any thing that is good: and the man who was stripped, and wounded, and left half dead^e, was but a faint emblem of the man who, feeling in himself innumerable corruptions, is unable to mortify so much as one of them, except as he is aided from above, and strengthened by communications of the Spirit of grace. St. Paul himself lamented his state in reference to this; yea, he even surpassed the Psalmist in his humiliating confessions and mournful complaints^f.]

But in the midst of all this, we view with pleasure,

II. His consolation—

He considered that God’s thoughts were exercised upon him—

[God is not an inattentive observer of any of his creatures: but “his eyes are more especially upon the righteous^g.” As “his eyes were upon the promised land from one end of the year even to the other^h,” so are they upon his own people in every place and in every age. He says, “I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give you an expected endⁱ.” He thinks of his people with *tender compassion*—with *anxious care*—with *joyful complacency*. How tenderly did he listen to the effusions of Ephraim’s sorrow^k! With what anxiety does he sit, as a refiner, to watch the vessel which he is purifying in the furnace, lest it should by any means suffer injury by the process that was intended only for its good^l! With what exultation too does he say, “To this man will I look, even unto him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit;” as though not all the angels in heaven could

^d Ps. lxxv. 3.^e Luke x. 30.^f Rom. vii. 24.^g Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. and xxxiv. 15.^h Job xxxvi. 7. Deut. xi. 12.ⁱ Jer. xxix. 11.^k Jer. xxxi. 18—20. and Hos. xiv. 8.^l Mal. iii. 3.

engage his attention in comparison of such a sight! David was sensible, that in the midst of all his spiritual distress he was not forgotten of his God; but that he was, notwithstanding all his unworthiness, an object of his paternal care^m.]

What comfort must such a consideration afford him!

[Surely greater consolation could scarcely be conceived than that which would arise from this source. What must it be to have *unsearchable wisdom* contriving for his good! ——— *almighty power* ready to execute whatever Divine wisdom should judge expedient! ——— *unbounded mercy* pleading, that his sins and frailties may not provoke God to withdraw his loving-kindness from him! ——— and, lastly, *unchanging faithfulness* demanding on his behalf the accomplishment of all the promises! ——— The consideration of these things must of necessity check every desponding fear, and constrain him to exclaim, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my Godⁿ.” And every one who can realize this one consideration, has within himself an antidote for every fear, and a balm for every wound.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who know little of David's experience—

[The generality of those who are called Christians would be ready to despise any one who should express himself like the inspired Psalmist. They would suppose that he was under the influence of a weak deluded mind. But let them not congratulate themselves on their fancied superiority; for they only betray their own ignorance^o. Let them rather seek to know themselves, that, being made sensible of their destitute condition, they may be made rich in Christ Jesus^p.]

2. Those whose feelings are like his—

[While you are complaining of your poverty, God is saying, “But thou art rich^q.” The truth is, that the more we are sensible of our guilt and helplessness, the more ready God is to help and deliver us: “The hungry he filleth with good things; but the rich he sends empty away.” Indeed he paints the most destitute condition that can be imagined, on purpose that he may administer consolation to us under it^r. If any then be cast down as though there were no hope, let them plead with him as David did^s: and they shall soon find, by

^m He knew it from both his past and present experience, Ps. xxxi. 7. with ver. 5.

ⁿ Ps. xlii. 11. ^o Rev. iii. 17. with Mic. iv. 12.

^p 1 Cor. i. 30. ^q Rev. ii. 9. ^r Isai. xli. 17, 18.

^s Ps. cxlii. 1—7.

happy experience, that “God’s thoughts and ways as far exceed ours, as the heavens are above the earth^t.”^u

^t See Ps. lxxii. 12, 13. which may be illustrated by Jonah i. 6, 15. and ii. 1—10.

^u If this were a subject for a *Charity Sermon*, the *Application* should be altered, and another substituted, recommending the audience to imitate God by thinking of the distresses of their fellow-creatures.

DLXXII.

DAVID’S DESIRE AFTER GOD.

Ps. xlii. 1, 2. *As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*

GREAT are the vicissitudes of the Christian life: sometimes the soul basks, if we may so speak, in the full splendour of the Sun of Righteousness; and at other times it feels not in any degree the cheering influence of his rays. And these variations are sometimes of shorter duration, like successive days; and at other times of longer continuance, like the seasons of the year. In David these changes were carried almost to the utmost extremes of elevation and depression, of confidence and despondency, of exultation and grief. At the time of writing this psalm he was driven from his throne by Absalom, and constrained to flee for his life beyond Jordan. There, exiled from the city and temple of his God, he stated, for the edification of the Church in all future ages, how ardently he longed for the renewed enjoyment of those ordinances, which were the delight and solace of his life. In these things he may be considered as a pattern for us: we shall therefore endeavour distinctly to mark,

I. The frame of his mind towards God—

This is described in terms peculiarly energetic “he thirsted after God; yea, he panted after him, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks.” We cannot conceive any image that could mark more strongly the intenseness of his desire, than that which is here

used. A hart or deer, when fleeing from its pursuers, has naturally its mouth parched through fear and terror: but when, by its own exertions in the flight, its very blood almost boils within it, the thirst is altogether insupportable, and the creature pants, or brays, (as the expression is,) for some brook, where it may refresh its sinking frame, and acquire strength for further exertions. Such was David's thirst after God, the living God.

His circumstances, it is true, were peculiar—

[Jerusalem was the place where God had appointed the ordinances of his worship: and David, being driven from thence, was precluded from a possibility of presenting to the Lord his accustomed offerings. This was a great distress to his soul: for though God was accessible to him in prayer, he could not hope for that measure of acceptance which he had reason to expect in an exact observance of the Mosaic ritual; nor could he hope that such manifestations would be vouchsafed to his soul, as he might have enjoyed, if he had approached God in the way prescribed by the law. Hence all his ardour might well be accounted for, since by the dispensation under which he lived, his way to the Deity was obstructed, and the communications of the Deity to him were intercepted.

We acknowledge that these peculiar circumstances account for the frame of David's mind at that time.]

Nevertheless, his frame is as proper for us as it was for him—

[Though the observance of certain rites and ceremonies is no longer necessary, and God may be approached with equal ease from any spot upon the globe, yet it is no easy matter to come into his presence, and to behold the light of his countenance lifted up upon us. To bow the knees before him, and to address him in a form of words, is a service which we may render without any difficulty; but to draw nigh to the very throne of God, to open our mouths wide, and to have our hearts enlarged in prayer, to plead with God, to wrestle with him, to obtain answers of prayer from him, and to maintain sweet fellowship with him from day to day, *this*, I say, is of very difficult attainment: to do it indeed is our duty, and to enjoy it is our privilege; but there are few who can reach these heights, or, having reached them, prolong to any great extent the heavenly vision. Hence we all have occasion to lament seasons of comparative darkness and declension; and to pant with insatiable avidity after the renewed enjoyment of an absent God.]

Let us then contemplate,

II. The evidences of this frame, wherever it exists—

Such a frame of mind must of necessity be attended with correspondent efforts to attain its object. There will be in us,

1. A diligent attendance on all the means of grace—

[Where shall we look for God, but in his holy word, where he reveals to us all his majesty and his glory? That word then we shall read with care, and meditate upon it day and night, and listen to the voice of God speaking to us in it — — — We shall also pray over it, converting every command into a petition, and every promise into an urgent plea — — — The public ordinances of religion we shall highly prize, because in them more especially we honour God, and have reason to expect more abundant manifestations of his love to our souls — — — At the table of the Lord too we shall be found frequent guests, not only because we are required by gratitude to remember the love of Christ in dying for us, but because the Lord Jesus still, as formerly, delights to “make himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread.” If we do really pant after God, I say again, we cannot but seek after him in the way of his ordinances.]

2. An acquiescence in every thing that may bring him nearer to us—

[God is pleased oftentimes to afflict his people, in order to wean them from the love of this present world, and to quicken their souls to more diligent inquiries after him. Now “affliction is not in itself joyous, but grievous:” nevertheless, when viewed in connexion with the end for which it is sent, it is welcomed even with joy and gratitude by all who are intent on the enjoyment of their God. In this view St. Paul “took pleasure in infirmities and distresses” of every kind, because they brought him to God, and God to him;—him, in a way of fervent prayer; and God, in a way of rich and abundant communication^a. In this view, every saint that has ever experienced tribulation in the ways of God is ready to say, that “it is good for him that he has been afflicted,” and that, if only God’s presence may be more abidingly manifested to his soul, he is ready to suffer the loss of all things, and to count them but dross and dung.]

3. A dread of every thing that may cause him to hide his face from us—

[We know that there is, in every generous heart, a dread of any thing that may wound the feelings of those we love:

^a 2 Cor. xii. 10.

how much more then will this exist in those who love God, and are panting after the enjoyment of him! Shall we, under such a frame of mind, go and do "the abominable thing which his soul hates?" shall we by any wilful misconduct "grieve the Holy Spirit of promise, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption?" No: when tempted to evil, we shall reject it with abhorrence, and say, "How shall I do this wickedness, and sin against God?" We shall "put away every accursed thing that may trouble our camp:" we shall not only turn from open and flagrant iniquity, but shall "abstain from the very appearance of evil." We shall search for sin in the heart, as the Jews searched for leaven in their houses, in order that we may be "a new lump, altogether unleavened." We shall strive to have our every action, every word, and "every thought, brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

4. A dissatisfaction of mind whenever we have not an actual sense of his presence—

[We cannot rest in a mere routine of duties: it is *God* that we seek, even the *living* God; and therefore we can never be satisfied with a *dead form*, nor with any number of forms, however multiplied. We shall look back to seasons of peculiar access to God, as the happiest periods of our life; and in the absence of God shall say, "O that it were with me as in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon my head!" We shall deprecate the hidings of his face as the severest affliction that we can endure; and shall never feel comfort in our minds, till we have regained the light of his countenance and the joy of his salvation. The conduct of the Church, in the Song of Solomon, is that which every one who truly loves the heavenly Bridegroom will observe: he will inquire after him with all diligence, and, having found him, will labour with augmented care to retain and perpetuate the expressions of his love^b.]

Let us LEARN then, from this example of David,

1. The proper object of our ambition—

[Crowns and kingdoms should not satisfy the Christian's ambition. He should seek to enjoy "God himself, even the living God," who has life in himself, and is the one source of life to the whole creation. David, when driven from his house and family, did not pant after his lost possessions, his ruined honours, his deserted relatives: it was God alone whose presence he so ardently desired. O that every desire of our souls may thus be swallowed up in God, whose loveliness and loving-kindness exceed all the powers of language to describe, or of any created imagination to conceive!]

2. The proper measure of our zeal—

^b Chap. iii. 1—4.

[In reference to earthly attainments, men in general contend, that it is scarcely possible to have our desires too ardent: but in reference to the knowledge and the enjoyment of God, they think even the smallest ardour is misplaced. But "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" and, if the measure of David's desire was right, then should not ours stop short of his. When we can explore the heights and depths of the Redeemer's love, or count the unsearchable riches of his grace, then may we limit our exertions according to the scale which we may derive from them: but, if they surpass all the powers of language or of thought, then may we take the hunted deer for our pattern, and never pause till we have attained the full fruition of our God.]

DLXXIII.

ACCESS TO GOD IN ORDINANCES.

Ps. xliii. 3, 4. *O send out thy light and thy truth! Let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God.*

IT is supposed that David wrote both this and the preceding psalm when he was driven from Jerusalem by his rebellious son, Absalom. After briefly calling on God to judge between him and his blood-thirsty enemies, he here shews, that the being separated from divine ordinances was to him the heaviest part of his affliction. True, indeed, his faithful servants, Zadok and Abiathar, had brought him the ark; but *that* he sent back again to its wonted residence^a; for to have the symbol of the Deity without his actual presence and favour, would afford him little consolation or benefit. To enjoy God in his ordinances, was his supreme delight. And hence he implores of God to "send forth his light and his truth," to conduct him back to them; for who but God could devise a way for his return? or what had he to depend upon in this hour of his extremity, but the promise and protection of God himself? In the event of his being restored to God's tabernacles, he determined that he would go with more delight than ever "to the altar of his God, even to God himself, who was his exceeding

^a 2 Sam. xv. 25.

joy," and there pay to God the vows which he had made: yes, and the harp which now hanged upon the willows should again be tuned, to sing with more devotion than ever the praises of his God. What he here promises, we find in another psalm he actually performed, as soon as the desired deliverance had been vouchsafed: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads: we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out, into a wealthy place. I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings: I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt-offerings of fatlings, with the incense of rams: I will offer bullocks with goats^b."

The words of my text consist of two parts; *a devout petition* to God to restore him to his wonted enjoyment of divine ordinances; and *a joyful anticipation* of augmented zeal in the service of his God. And, in correspondence with these, we see what, under all circumstances, it becomes us chiefly to affect; namely,

I. An intelligent and believing access to God—

It is not sufficient that we attend divine ordinances. Many frequent them without any benefit at all. We must be "led to them by God's light and truth," that so we may attend upon them with *intelligence and faith*.

[Who but God can teach us how to approach him acceptably? Or what hope can we have in approaching him, except from the promises which he has given us in the Son of his love? In order to derive benefit to our souls, we must entreat God to "send forth his light and his truth, that they may lead us." It is only as reconciled to us in Christ Jesus, that we can venture to draw nigh to God: for in himself, though a God of love to the penitent, he is to the impenitent "a consuming fire." Nor could we presume to come to him in Christ Jesus, if he had not expressly declared that he would forgive our sins, and receive us to mercy for Jesus' sake — — — "This is the new and living way which God has opened to sinful man^c;" (all access to the tree of life in any other way is barred for ever^d;) and we should implore of God to reveal it to us, that so we may

^b Ps. lxvi. 12—15.

^c Heb. x. 19, 20.

^d Gen. iii. 24.

find acceptance with him, and be restored to that communion with him from which "we have been separated by our sins^e."]

But we should look still farther to,

II. A life of entire devotedness to his service—

David would offer on God's altar the sacrifices appointed by the Law. But we have a richer offering than all the cattle upon a thousand hills: yes, we ourselves are the sacrifices which God calls for; and, "as living sacrifices we must present ourselves to him," that every faculty and power we possess may be consecrated altogether to his service^f.

[Truly, if God was to David "his exceeding joy," much more must he be so to us. To David, the wonders of Redeeming Love were, comparatively, but little known. Even John the Baptist himself had but a faint insight into them, in comparison of us. "The height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ," which not even an Archangel can fully comprehend, are revealed to us; and in the contemplation of them we should "rejoice in Him with joy unspeakable and glorified^g." Never should our harp lie still. We should be singing his praises every day, and all the day long. Nor need our access to God be in the least restrained by the want of public ordinances. Doubtless they are of infinite value; for "God loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob:" but in every house, and in every heart, is an altar to the Lord, from whence the sacrifices of prayer and praise may ascend up before God continually, and be regarded by him as "offerings of a sweet-smelling savour." In a word, to be devoted to God in heart and life is the great end of ordinances; which are no farther serviceable to us, or acceptable to God, than as they are productive of these effects. And, as it was for this end that David so earnestly implored of God a restoration to his ordinances, so it is this which, in attending upon ordinances, we, my Brethren, must continually bear in mind, and make the great object of our pursuit.]

APPLICATION—

[As for those who are strangers to spiritual religion, I forbear to address this subject to them; for to them it can appear, as the Apostle tells us, no better than "foolishness^h:" and their very ignorance of the subject is itself a sufficient condemnation to them. But to those who have been endued with somewhat of a spiritual discernment, I may say, this subject affords abundant matter for the deepest humiliation. For,

^e Isai. lix. 2. ^f Rom. xii. 1. ^g 1 Pet. i. 8. ^h 1 Cor. ii. 14.

who amongst us values God's ordinances as David did, and accounts the loss of them the most bitter ingredient even in the bitterest cup which he has to drink? And, in attending upon them, what coldness and formality do we too often feel! As for "our joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ," how faint is it, when compared with that which he expressed in the psalm before us, even in the midst of his heavy and accumulated afflictions! Dear Brethren, I blush for you, and for myself also: and I would propose to you to adopt, for our future imitation, that resolved purpose of the Psalmist, "O God, my heart is fixed, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up my glory, awake psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people; I will sing unto thee among the nations: for thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earthⁱ." Happy shall we be if we attain to such a frame; for it is an anticipation and foretaste of heaven itself.]

ⁱ Ps. lvii. 7—11.

DLXXIV.

SOURCES AND REMEDY OF DEJECTION.

Ps. xliii. 5. *Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*

IT has pleased God to suffer many of his most eminent servants to be in trouble, and to record their experience for our benefit, that we, when in similar circumstances, may know, that we are not walking in an untrodden path, and that we may see how to demean ourselves aright. The Psalmist was conversant with afflictions of every kind. In the preceding psalm, which seems to have been penned during his flight from Absalom, he gives us a very melancholy picture of his state: tears were his meat day and night, while his enemies gloried over him, and said continually, Where is now thy God^a? "His soul was cast down within him:" for while "the waves and billows threatened to overwhelm him, the water-spouts threatened to burst upon him: so that

^a Ps. xlii. 3, 10.

deep called unto deep^b," to effect his ruin; and it seemed as if all the powers of heaven and earth were combined against him. In complaining of these things, he sometimes expostulates with God, "Why hast thou forgotten me^c?" but at other times he checks himself, and, as it were, reproves his soul for its inquietude and despondency^d. The psalm before us was evidently written on the same occasion: it contains the same complaints^e; and ends, like the former, with a third time condemning his own impatience, and encouraging his soul to trust in God.

His words lead us to consider,

I. The sources of dejection—

It cannot be doubted but that *temporal* afflictions will produce a very great dejection of mind: for though sometimes grace will enable a person to triumph over them as of small consequence, yet more frequently our frail nature is left to feel its weakness: and the effect of grace is, to reconcile us to the dispensations of Providence, and to make them work for our good: still however, though we are *saints*, we cease not to be *men*: and it often happens, that heavy and accumulated troubles will so weaken the animal frame, as ultimately to enfeeble the mind also, and to render it susceptible of fears, to which, in its unbroken state, it was an utter stranger. The inquietude of the Psalmist himself arose in a measure from this source: and therefore we must not wonder if heavy losses, and cruel treatment from our near friends, or troubles of any other kind, should weigh down the spirits of those who have made less attainments in the divine life. But we shall confine our attention principally to *spiritual* troubles: and among these we shall find many fruitful sources of dejection:

^b Ps. xlii. 6, 7. Water-spouts are very formidable to mariners, because if they burst over a ship, they will sink it instantly: and here they are represented as conspiring with the tempestuous ocean for their destruction.

^c Ps. xlii. 9.

^d Ps. xlii. 5, 11.

^e Compare xlii. 9. with xliii. 2.

1. Relapses into sin—

[By far the greatest part of our sorrows originates here. A close and uniform walk with God is productive of peace: but declensions from him bring guilt upon the conscience, together with many other attendant evils. And if those professors of religion who complain so much of their doubts and fears, would examine faithfully the causes of their disquietude, they might trace it up to secret neglects of duty, or to some lust harboured and indulged — — —]

2. The temptations of Satan—

[Doubtless this wicked fiend is an occasion of much trouble to the people of God; else his temptations had not been characterized as “fiery darts^f,” which suddenly pierce and inflame the soul. We may judge in a measure how terrible his assaults are, when we see the Apostle, who was unmoved by all that man could do against him^g, crying out with such agony and distress under the buffetings of Satan^h. We shall have a yet more formidable idea of them, if we consider that the Lord of glory himself, when conflicting with the powers of darkness, sweat great drops of blood from every pore of his body, through the agony of his soul. Can we wonder then if the saints are sometimes dejected through the agency of that subtle enemy?]

3. The hidings of God’s face—

[We do not think that God *often* hides his face from men without some immediate provocation: but we dare not to say that he *never* does; because he is sovereign in the disposal of his gifts; and because he withdrew the light of his countenance from Job without any flagrant transgression on the part of his servant to deserve it. It is scarcely needful to observe, how painful that must be to those who love God: our blessed Lord, who bore the cruelties of men without a complaint, was constrained to cry out bitterly under his dereliction from his heavenly Father, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And certainly this is the most distressing of all events: “the spirit of a man, when strengthened from above, may sustain any infirmity; but a wounded spirit, wounded too by such a hand, who can bearⁱ?”]

Having traced out the sources of dejection, let us inquire after,

II. The remedy—

The great remedy for every temporal or spiritual affliction is faith. This, and this alone, is adequate to our necessities. The efficacy of this principle for

^f Eph. vi. 16.

^g Acts xx. 24.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

ⁱ Prov. xviii. 14.

the space of three thousand six hundred years is declared in the 11th chapter to the Hebrews; toward the close of which, we are told what it enabled them to *do*^k, and what to *suffer*^l. It was that which the Psalmist prescribed to himself as the cure of his disquietude:

1. "Hope in God"—

[We are too apt in our troubles to flee unto the creature for help^m. But it is God who sends our troubles; ("they spring not out of the dustⁿ,") and he only can remove them. We should therefore look unto him, and put our trust in him. This is the direction which God himself gives us: he reminds us of his wisdom and power to over-rule our trials for good; and exhorts us, when weary and fainting, to wait on him as our all-sufficient Helper^o.]

2. Expect deliverance from him—

[To what end has God given us such "exceeding great and precious promises," if we do not rest upon them, and expect their accomplishment? The refiner does not put his vessels into the furnace, to leave them there; but to take them out again when they are fitted for his use. And it is to purify us as "vessels of honour," that God subjects us to the fiery trial. We should say therefore with Job, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold^p." It was this expectation that supported David: "I had fainted," says he, "unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living^q." We are told that "light is sown for the righteous^r." That is sufficient for us. Between seed-time and harvest there may be a long and dreary winter; but still every day brings forward the appointed time of harvest; and the husbandman waiteth in an assured expectation of its arrival^s. Thus must we wait, however long the promise may seem to tarry^t: and as those who are now in heaven were once in great tribulation like ourselves^u, so shall we in due season be with them, freed from all remains of sin and sorrow. In our darkest hours we should hold fast this confidence, "I shall yet praise him^x."]

3. View him in his covenant relation to you—

[It is observable, that our Lord, in the midst of his dereliction, addressed his Father, "*My* God! *my* God!" Now thus should *we* do. God is the God of all his people; yea, he

^k Heb. xi. 33, 34.

^l Heb. xi. 36, 37.

^m Hos. v. 13.

ⁿ Job v. 6.

^o Isai. xl. 28—31.

^p Job xxiii. 10.

^q Ps. xxvii. 13.

^r Ps. xcvi. 11.

^s Jam. v. 7.

^t Hab. ii. 3.

^u Rev. vii. 14.

^x Compare Ps. cxviii. 17, 18. with the text.

dwells in them^y, and is, as it were, the very life of their souls^z. However distressed then we be, we should regard him as “the health of our countenance, and our God.” What a foundation of hope did the remembrance of God’s paternal relation to them afford to the Church of old^a! And what a sweet assurance does God himself teach *us* also to derive from the same source^b! If we unfeignedly desire to be his, we have good reason to believe that we are his: and if we be his, he will never suffer any to pluck us out of his hand^c. Hold fast this therefore, as an anchor of the soul; and it shall keep you steadfast amidst all the storms and tempests that can possibly assail you.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are in a drooping desponding frame—

[We cannot give you better counsel than that suggested by the example of David.

Inquire, first, into the reasons of your disquietude. If it proceed from temporal afflictions, recollect, that they are rather tokens of God’s love, than of his hatred; for “whom he loveth he chasteneth^d.” If it arise from the temptations of Satan, take not *all* the blame to yourselves; but cast a good measure of it at least on him from whom they proceed. If you are troubled about the hidings of God’s face, entreat him to return, and to lift up upon you once more the light of his countenance. And if, as is most probable, “your own sins have hid his face from you,” humble yourself for them, and implore his grace that you may be enabled henceforth to mortify and subdue them. At all events, having once searched out the cause, you will know the better how to apply a remedy.

But, in the next place, it will be proper to *check these desponding fears*. The text is not a mere inquiry, but an expostulation; and such an expostulation as you should address to your own souls. For, what benefit can accrue from such a frame? It only weakens your hands, and discourages your heart, and dishonours your God. We do not say that there are not just occasions for disquietude: but this we say, that instead of continuing in a dejected state, you should return instantly to God, who would “give you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness^e.”

But, above all, “*encourage yourself in God.*” This is what David did in the text, and on another most memorable occasion^f. And while there is an all-sufficient God on whom to

^y 2 Cor. vi. 16.

^z Col. iii. 4.

^a Isai. lxiii. 15, 16.

^b Isai. xlix. 14—16.

^c John x. 27, 28.

^d Heb. xii. 6.

^e Isai. lxi. 3.

^f 1 Sam. xxx. 1—6.

rely, you need not fear though earth and hell should be combined against you^g.]

2. Those who are entire strangers to disquietude and dejection—

[We are far from congratulating you on your exemption from such feelings as these. On the contrary, we would propose to you, *in reference to that exemption*, the very same things as we recommended to others in reference to their distresses.

First, *inquire into the reason* of your never having experienced such feelings. “Why art thou NOT cast down, O my soul? and why art thou NOT disquieted within me?” Does it not proceed from an ignorance of your own state, and from an unconcern about that account which you must soon give of yourself at the judgment-seat of Christ? — — —

Next, *expostulate with yourself*; “O my soul, why art thou thus callous and insensible? Will not thy contempt of God’s judgments issue in thy ruin? — — — It must not, it shall not be: thou hast neglected thine eternal interests long enough: thou shalt, God helping thee, bend thine attention to them from this time: for if thou be summoned before thy God in thy present state, it had been better for me that I had never been born.”

But you also, no less than the disconsolate, must *found your hopes on God*. All your expectation must be from Him, “with whom there is mercy and plenteous redemption.” If you will but turn to him in earnest, you have nothing to fear: for his word to you is, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”]

^g Ps. xi. 1, 4. and xxvii. 1, 3. and cxxv. 1.

DLXXV.

THE REIGN OF CHRIST DESIRED.

Ps xlv. 3—5. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.*

THIS psalm is called “a song of loves:” and it is supposed to have been written on occasion of Solomon’s marriage with Pharaoh’s daughter. But, beyond all doubt, a greater than Solomon is here.

Solomon was altogether a man of peace : but the King here spoken of was “a man of war;” and all the address which is here made to him has reference to him under that character. It may seem strange that this view of him should be introduced on the occasion of a nuptial solemnity ; but it must be remembered, that as the Jews were wont, by God’s special permission, to connect themselves in marriage with females whom they had taken captive in war, allowing them a month to forget their former relatives, so the Messiah first takes captive those with whom he afterwards unites himself in the nuptial bonds. This is particularly marked in the address to the spouse herself : “Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house ; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty^a.” Hence, even whilst contemplating the Lord Jesus under the idea of an husband, we see why we should be anxious to behold his conquests extended over the face of the whole earth. That we may attain the spirit which David breathed, let us consider,

I. The frame of his mind—

In reading the Holy Scriptures, we should not be content with noticing the *mere sense* of any particular passage, (though *that* is doubtless in the first place, and with the greatest diligence, to be examined ;) but we should mark the peculiar spirit of it, the spirit which the passage itself breathes, the spirit of the person who wrote it, or which it has a tendency to produce in those who read it. Now, when David penned this psalm,

His mind was full of zeal for Christ—

[He had been contemplating the glory and excellency of Christ : “My heart,” says he, “is inditing a good matter : I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.” And so full was his heart of this glorious subject, that “his tongue was as the pen of a ready writer,” which yet was scarcely capable of keeping pace with the ardour of his mind, or of giving utterance to the vast conceptions with which his soul laboured.

^a ver. 10, 11.

He beheld the Lord Jesus Christ as possessing in himself an excellency far beyond that of any created being: "Thou art fairer than the children of men." He saw that, both in the *subject* and *manner* of his ministrations, there was a grace which nothing could equal, and which God would honour with the most wonderful success: "Grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." And anxious to behold the full accomplishment of all that the Messiah had undertaken, he further calls upon him to take to him his great power, and to subdue the whole world unto himself: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, and let the people of every nation under heaven fall under thee." In all this you will perceive, that, instead of speaking *of* Christ, as he had intended to do, he is constrained, by the ardour of his own mind, to address himself directly *to* Christ; and, instead of making his thoughts a subject of communication with *man*, he is led by them into the exercise of immediate communion with his *God*. Now,]

Such should be the frame of our minds also—

[We should be in the constant habit of meditating upon Christ; and of so musing upon his glorious excellencies, that a fire should be kindled in our bosoms, and we should speak of him with our tongues. And what other subject is there under heaven to be compared with this? Reflect a moment, who the Saviour is! He is "the mighty God." Consider what he has done! He has assumed our nature, and become a man, in order that, by substituting himself in our place and stead, he might deliver us out of the hands of our great enemy, and bring us into an everlasting union with himself, as "our Friend and our Beloved." Consider how rich and free and full are all his invitations and promises: and what blessings will attend the progress of his arms, wheresoever men shall be subdued unto him. Should we not long to see his glory advance, and his kingdom established in the world? Should it not be grievous to us to behold so great a part of the world both ignorant of him, and in rebellion against him? Should we not be urgent with him in prayer, to make bare his arm, and to subdue the world unto himself? Surely these are the meditations that become us; and our hearts should be so full of them, that, wherever we go, and whatever we do, He should be present to our minds; and his praise should be, as it were, the constant effusion of our souls.]

But in my text we are more particularly led to notice,

II. The object of his desire—

He desires that Christ's kingdom may be esta-

blished in the world. But, that I may open this to you the more fully, I wish you to mark,

1. Wherein that kingdom consists—

[It is “in the cause of truth and meekness and righteousness” that the Saviour advances to the combat. The whole world is lying in darkness; and he comes to dispel error from their minds. The whole world is full of all manner of abominations: pride stalks through the earth, defying even God himself: “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?” and every species of wickedness is indulged, without either remorse or fear. But the Lord Jesus Christ comes to humble man in the dust before God; and to transform the children of the wicked one into the very image of their God, in righteousness and true holiness. Who must not wish for such a kingdom to be established throughout the whole world? Who must not make it his very first petition from day to day, “Thy kingdom come?” — — — Truly, wherever that kingdom is, which consists “in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,” there is heaven itself begun in the souls of men.]

2. By what means it is to be erected—

[The sword of the Messiah is the word of God, which, proceeding from his mouth^b, subdues the universe before him. “That sword is quick and powerful, and pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart^c.” Nothing can eventually stand before it: weak as it may appear, it is “mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ^d.” Look at the primitive ages of the Church: what was it that brought down all the power and policy both of men and devils? It was not human wisdom, or worldly power: it was the simple exhibition of the cross of Christ, and the preaching of Christ crucified. “This word came to the hearts of men in demonstration of the Spirit and of power;” and, to every soul that received it, it was made “the power of God to his everlasting salvation.”]

3. The certainty of its establishment—

[Very sharp were the arrows which were thus sent forth from the Messiah’s bow. Truly “he was a polished shaft in the quiver of Jehovah^e,” and nothing could stand before it^f. True, indeed, God has not yet seen fit to accomplish all the purposes of his grace: but the time is quickly coming, when Satan, that great adversary of God and man, shall be bound,

^b Rev. i. 16. and xix. 15. ^c Heb. iv. 12. ^d 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

^e Isai. xlix. 2.

^f Isai. lix. 16—18.

and “all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.” “Terrible things will God work,” either in a way of mercy or of judgment. He has sworn, that “unto his Messiah every knee shall bow^g.” And every soul that bows not to the sceptre of his grace shall be “broken in pieces, as a potter’s vessel^h.”]

Methinks you will now be disposed to ask—

1. How shall I know whether this kingdom be yet begun within me?

[Consider only wherein this kingdom consists; and you will be at no loss to ascertain the state of your souls before God. Has the truth of the Gospel been so revealed in your hearts, as to “bring you out of darkness into marvellous light”? — — — Have you been so humbled by it, as to put your hand on your mouth, and your mouth in the dust, with a deep consciousness of your vileness, and of your desert of God’s wrath and indignation? — — — And, lastly, are you so under “the constraining influence of the love of Christ, that you die daily unto sin, and live altogether, not unto yourselves, but unto Him who died for you, and rose again?” These are questions which, if put to your consciences with fidelity, and answered with truth, will shew you at once whose you are, and whom you serve. Truly, by such marks we may infallibly “distinguish the children of God from the children of the devilⁱ,” and I entreat you to examine yourselves by them with all imaginable care; because, if you still continue to cast off the Saviour’s yoke, the time will quickly come when he will say, “Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me^k.”]

2. How shall I get it established in my soul?

[You have seen the frame of David’s mind. You have seen how he contemplated the Saviour’s love, till his soul was ravished with it, and he burst forth into the devout raptures which we have been contemplating. And this is the way in which the Saviour will acquire an ascendant over our souls. The Apostle tells us: “We, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord^l.” I am far from saying that we ought not to search out our own evil ways, and to mourn over them before God; for it is by such repentance that the preparatory work is usually wrought within us: but I say, that nothing but the love of Christ will ever perfect that work, or bring us into the full liberty of the children of God.

^g Isai. xlv. 23.

^h Ps. ii. 8, 9.

ⁱ 1 John iii. 9, 10.

^k Luke xix. 27.

^l 2 Cor. iii. 18.

It is from a view of God's "truth" that our "meekness" will be matured, and our "righteousness" be perfected: and when we are enabled to live altogether by faith in Christ, and in dependence on his promises, then shall we be enabled to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God^m."]

^m 2 Cor. vii. 1.

DLXXVI.

BENEFITS ATTENDANT ON HOLINESS.

Ps. xlv. 7. *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

THIS psalm is a nuptial song; wherein Christ, as the heavenly Bridegroom, is celebrated by his Bride, the Church; and she also is commended by him as worthy of the union proposed between them. In the former part, the glory and excellency of Jesus are set forth in a variety of views. In the verse before the text, he is addressed as the supreme "God, whose throne is for ever and ever;" while, as man, he is acknowledged to have received his glory and felicity from the Father, as the reward of his unparalleled virtues. This is undoubtedly the primary sense of the words before us. But they may also be considered as containing a general truth, expressive of God's regard for holiness, and of those testimonies of his approbation which all godly people shall enjoy.

Let us then turn our attention to them,

I. As applicable to Christ—

That they refer to him there can be no doubt; because in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is expressly affirmed that they were addressed to him^a.

To him the character transcendently belongs—

[*In his doctrine*, he removed the false glosses with which the Jewish doctors had obscured the law, and established its authority over the motions of the heart as well as the actions of the life^b. He laid the axe at the very root of sin; and gave a

^a Heb. i. 8, 9.

^b He shewed that the laws prohibiting murder and adultery were violated by an angry word or impure desire. Matt. xxv. 21, 22, 27, 28.

system of morality more pure and perfect than the united wisdom of the whole world had been ever able to devise.

In his life, "he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Neither his friends who were most intimate with him, nor his enemies who were most inveterate against him, could ever find the smallest flaw or blemish in his conduct. God himself repeatedly attests that "in him was no sin."

But most of all *in his death* did our blessed Lord approve himself a lover of righteousness and a hater of iniquity: for he died in order to expiate the guilt of sin: yea, he came down from heaven on purpose to atone for it by his blood; and to mark in indelible characters its malignity, by the very means which he used to deliver us from its curse.

In the whole scope of the economy which he introduced, he manifested the same righteous disposition: for at the same time that he commissioned his Apostles to go forth and evangelize all nations, he bade them "teach their proselytes to observe and do whatsoever he had commanded." His Gospel, while it "brings salvation to men, teaches them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world:" and the ministers who are sent forth to proclaim it, are "sent to bless men, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities."]

On this account God in a super-eminent degree "anointed him with the oil of gladness"—

[The Father "gave not the Spirit by measure unto him," even during the time of his ministration upon earth^c. But though he was anointed in this world in an infinitely more abundant measure than all who were partakers of the same divine unction, yet it was rather after his death that the Spirit was given to him as "the oil of gladness." At his ascension the words before us received their full accomplishment. Then was "the joy given him, in the expectation of which he had endured the cross and despised the shame." Then was he "made full of joy by the light of his Father's countenance^d," and was invested with a glory as much transcending that of the highest archangel, as the brightness of the sun exceeds the lustre of a glimmering star. This was given him as the reward of his righteousness: "he loved righteousness;" "therefore the Lord anointed him with this oil of gladness^e."]

Though this is the primary sense of the words, we may without impropriety consider them,

II. As applicable to us—

^c See Isai. xi. 2. and lxi. 1.

^d Compare Ps. xvi. 10, 11. and xxi. 6. with Acts ii. 27, 28.

^e Phil. ii. 8, 9.

The character of the true Christian is here most fitly drawn—

[There are many unbelievers whose moral characters are unexceptionable: they *abstain from* open iniquity, and they *perform* many acts of righteousness. But the distinctive mark of the believer is, that “he *loves* righteousness and *hates* iniquity.” He looks upon sin as the worst enemy of his soul. Not contented with suppressing the outward acts of it, he strives to mortify its inward motions. The existence of sin within him is his pain, his burthen, his grief. He abhors it; he loathes himself on account of it: he often cries with anguish of heart, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?” As for righteousness, he considers it as the health and felicity of his soul. It is the very element in which he desires to live. Were he possessed of it in ever so high a degree, he would not be satisfied, as long as there were any measure of it which he had not attained. He would be “holy as God is holy,” and “perfect as God is perfect.” We repeat it, that *this is the distinctive character of a true believer*. Others, whatever their conduct be, have no real hatred of secret sin, no unfeigned delight in the secret exercises of religion: but in the believer these dispositions radically and abidingly exist.]

On this account God vouchsafes him the richest communications—

[Who amongst the sons of pleasure can be compared with the Christian in respect to real happiness? The happiness of the carnal man is only as “the crackling of thorns under a pot;” it blazes for a little time, and then expires in smoke. Let a true Christian be bereft of all that the world holds most dear, and be reduced to a condition the most calamitous in the eyes of carnal men, yet would he not exchange states with the happiest worldling upon earth: he would spurn at the proposal with contemptuous indignation.

But it is not merely over the ungodly world that a lively Christian has this advantage: “he is anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows,” above those who in an inferior degree participate the same heavenly calling. Occasional circumstances of temptation or of darkness may indeed for a time reduce the most eminent Christian below the standard of his weaker brother: but *in the general* it will be found, that the more we have of the divine image, the more we shall abound in heavenly consolation: they will have most of heaven in their souls, who have the greatest meetness for it in their hearts and lives.

And though these holy joys are not bestowed on account of the believer’s *merits*, yet are they strictly and properly a reward for his piety: they are a reward of grace, though not

a payment of a debt. God has in numberless places assured his people, that "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," and that "it shall be well with the righteous, who shall eat the fruit of their doings^f."]

INFER,

1. What a mercy is it to have such an example as Christ!

[If we entertain any doubt how we ought to walk, or what shall be the issue of a godly life, we need only look to the Lord Jesus Christ: in him we see precisely "how we ought to walk and to please God," and what shall be the termination of a life spent in the service of our God. In him we shall find an answer to the cavils of the world on the one hand, and to the suggestions of Satan on the other. In those things which Christ did as a prophet, or as the Mediator, he is not an example to us; but in all other things he is: and as surely as we tread in his steps in this world, we shall be seated with him on his throne in the world to come.]

2. How vain are the expectations of those who are not conformed to it!

[Holiness and happiness are inseparable. It is in vain to hope for the "oil of gladness," if we be not lovers of righteousness, and haters of iniquity. We may applaud and canonize those who conform to the world's standard of perfection; but God will not ratify our sentence. The precepts of the Gospel are the infallible, the only rule of duty. They were exhibited in all their perfection by our blessed Lord, who gave us in his own life a comment on them. If we labour to imitate Him, and to walk in all things as he walked, our short-comings and defects will be forgiven us for His sake: but if we make any reserves in our obedience, we shall be regarded as despisers of his law, and take our portion with hypocrites and unbelievers. "Herein the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; he that doeth not righteousness is not of God."]

^f Isai. iii. 10.

DLXXVII.

THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH AS MARRIED TO CHRIST.

Ps. xlv. 10, 11. *Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.*

THE psalm before us is a kind of nuptial hymn; the former part of which recites the excellencies and

glories of the heavenly Bridegroom; and the latter celebrates the praises of the Church, which is his bride. Into this relation to Christ every Believer is brought^a.

Now, as every change of situation brings with it correspondent duties, so that of marriage in particular requires a sacrifice of all other attachments. It binds each party to renounce whatever habits or practices may be found inconsistent with their mutual happiness. Such sacrifices are more eminently necessary for those united to Christ. To this effect, God addresses the Church in the words of our text.

We may consider,

I. The direction given to the Church—

The Church is, by adoption, by regeneration, and especially by her union with the Lord Jesus Christ, become the “daughter of Almighty God^b.” She is here addressed by him under that affectionate appellation. Nor is it possible for a father to give more salutary advice, or to deliver it in more persuasive terms; “Hearken, consider, incline,” &c.

The direction itself is of a very peculiar nature—

[The Jews were permitted to marry the heathen virgins whom they had taken in war; but they were to allow them the space of a month to forget their own relations^c. Thus the captives, weaned from former habits, might become loving companions, and obedient wives. In reference to this law, the Church is exhorted to forget her former friends. She has been taken captive by Christ, who makes her the first overtures of marriage; but his union with her is incompatible with carnal attachments. She can never love and obey him as she ought, till her heart is weaned from all other lovers.]

It is given to every individual in the church of God—

[Every wife is to forsake her parents, and cleave to her husband^d: much more is it needful for the soul to forsake all for Christ. To him we are espoused by our own voluntary surrender^e; nor will he be satisfied with a divided heart^f. Ungodliness and worldly lusts must be entirely renounced^g:

^a Isai. liv. 5. ^b 2 Cor. vi. 18. ^c Deut. xxi. 10—13.

^d Gen. ii. 24. ^e 2 Cor. xi. 2. ^f Hos. x. 2.

^g Tit. ii. 11, 12. and 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

the companions of our unregenerate state must be forsaken^h. Our very parents, yea, even life itself, must be hated, when they stand in competition with himⁱ. The change in our actions and affections must be entire^k; and we must subscribe from our hearts the terms proposed to us^l.]

This injunction will not appear harsh, if we attend to,
II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

God deals with us in all things as intelligent beings, and labours to persuade us by rational considerations.

1. It is our highest interest—

[Though the Church is vile in herself, she is complete in Christ^m: he has given orders for her thorough purificationⁿ. When she is presented to him, she is cleansed from all the filthiness of her former state^o. Hence she is exceeding beautiful in his eyes^p; and he feels a longing desire after communion with her^q. No bridegroom ever so much rejoiced over his bride, as he over her^r. More especially is he delighted with her when he sees that her heart is whole and entire with him^s. How powerful an argument is this with an ingenuous soul! What can influence a wife more than to know that her conduct will conciliate the esteem of her husband? And what can delight a regenerate soul so much, as to please the Lord Jesus Christ? Let this hope then animate us to renounce all for him, and to address him in the words of holy David^t.]

2. It is our indispensable duty—

[The husband is to be considered as lord over his wife^u: to him she owes an humble obediential reverence^x. Christ also is the supreme Head and “LORD” of his Church. No limits whatever are to be set to his authority. We must “worship” and serve “HIM” equally with God the Father^y. Let us then at least shew him that regard, which we ourselves expect from a fellow-creature. A husband will not endure a rival in his wife’s affections; shall we then “provoke the Lord himself to jealousy” by carnal attachments? Let us not dare in such a way to violate our nuptial engagements. When any thing solicits a place in our hearts, let us utterly reject it; and let us exercise that fidelity towards him, which we have ever experienced at his hands.]

ADDRESS—

^h 2 Cor. vi. 14—17.

ⁱ Hos. iii. 3.

^o Eph. v. 25—27.

^r Isai. lxii. 5.

^u 1 Pet. iii. 6.

ⁱ Luke xiv. 26.

^m Col. ii. 10.

^p Cant. iv. 9—11.

^s Prov. xi. 20.

^x Eph. v. 33.

^k 2 Cor. v. 17.

ⁿ Esther ii. 3.

^q Cant. ii. 14.

^t Ps. lxxiii. 25.

^y John v. 23.

1. Those who are endeavouring to unite the love of the world with the love of Christ—

[The interests of the world, and of Christ, are altogether opposite. Our Lord declares them to be absolutely irreconcilable^z. St. James also represents even a wish to reconcile them, as an incontestable proof of enmity against God^a. As Jesus deserves, so he demands, our whole hearts^b. Let us not then “mock him, and deceive ourselves.” If the Lord be God, let us not serve Baal, but him^c; and let us unite in imitating the repentant Jews^d.]

2. Those who are desirous of uniting themselves to Christ—

[It is a great honour indeed which ye aspire after; yet is it offered to the vilest of the human race^e. But you must get a change of raiment, that you may not dishonour your new station^f. Labour then to “purge out all remains of the old leaven.” Be on your guard, lest, after having escaped the pollutions of the world, you be again entangled with them and overcome^g. “Remember Lot’s wife,” that you may shun her example; so shall you enjoy the sweetest fellowship with Jesus, and live in the fruition of him to all eternity^h.]

^z Matt. vi. 24.

^a Jam. iv. 4.

^b Prov. xxiii. 26.

^c 1 Kings xviii. 21.

^d 2 Chron. xv. 12.

^e Ezek. xvi. 3, 4, 5, 8.

^f Zech. iii. 3—5. Rev. xix. 7, 8.

^g 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^h This subject, and all others of a similar nature, must be treated with extreme care and delicacy. The passages from the book of Canticles are cited rather for the reader’s satisfaction, than for use in a public discourse.

DLXXVIII.

THE CHURCH'S BEAUTY AND HAPPINESS.

Ps. xlv. 13—16. *The King’s daughter is all glorious within : her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work : the virgins, her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee : with gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought ; they shall enter into the King’s palace.*

AMONGST the schoolmen of former days, there were many disputes about works of condignity, and works of congruity, as contributing to effect the salvation of men. That in no point of view whatever, did works render men deserving of God’s favours is the avowed sentiment of our Church ; yet to the full

attainment of salvation, it is quite necessary that every man be holy, and possess what the Scriptures call “a meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The Church is here represented under the character of a Bride that is to be joined, as in the marriage union, to her Lord. For this she must be prepared: and a preparation shall be given her suited to the occasion. In the former part of this psalm, which is penned on the occasion of her marriage, the excellencies of her Lord are set forth: in this latter part, *her* excellencies also. Let us consider,

I. Her transcendent qualities—

In the words which we have read, we see,

1. The internal qualities of her mind—

[“The King’s daughter is all glorious within.” She once, in her unconverted state, was corrupt even as others: but she has been “born again,” and “renewed in the spirit of her mind,” and made altogether “a new creature.” Once, being born only after the flesh, she had nothing but what was carnal: but now, having been born of the Spirit, she possesses a truly spiritual nature, or, as St. Peter expresses it, “she is a partaker of the Divine nature^a,” and is progressively “changed into the image of her Lord himself, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord^b.” Hence “the mind that was in Christ Jesus is found in her^c.” She has the same views, the same principles, the same desires, the same delights. There is indeed still a corrupt nature within her, “the flesh lusting against the Spirit, as well as the Spirit against the flesh:” but she longs to be holy, as her Lord is holy; and strives to be “perfect, as her Father which is in heaven is perfect.” When compared with what she was, she differs as light from darkness: but in comparison of what she will be, she is only as the dawn to the meridian sun; for “her path is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”]

2. The external habits of her life—

[“Her clothing is of wrought gold.” This refers to the outward conversation, which is often in Scripture represented as a putting off of the old man, and putting on the new: “Put off, as concerning the former conversation,” says the Apostle, “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which after God is created in right-

^a 2 Pet. i. 4.

^b 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^c Phil. ii. 5.

eousness and true holiness^d." To the same effect is that other expression of his, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ^e:" that is, let your whole deportment be such as his was; so that any one who beholds you may be constrained to confess, that you "walk as he walked^f," and that, "as he was, so are you in this world^g." Such is every true Believer; nor will the heavenly Bridegroom acknowledge as his, any one, whose spirit, and temper, and conduct do not accord with his. "The raiment of needle-work" may fitly represent the assemblage of all the diversified graces which adorn her. All her dispositions being duly chastised, harmoniously tempered, and opportunely exercised, she shines in every department, and in every act; and at once approves herself faithful to her obligations, and meet for the ulterior honours that shall be conferred upon her.]

Suited to these qualities is,

II. The felicity prepared for her—

In due time "she shall be brought to the King's palace," there to be united to him in indissoluble and everlasting bonds.

Whilst she is here, she is to be employed in making herself ready—

[In royal nuptials, much time was spent in preparing the bride for her husband. In the purification of the virgins from amongst whom King Ahasuerus was to select a wife, a whole year was occupied: "six months in purifying them with oil of myrrh, and other six months with sweet odours of different kinds^h:" after which they were presented to him. In like manner we are told, that the Church also is dealt with, in order to prepare her for her heavenly Bridegroom: for it is said, that "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemishⁱ.*"

This process is going forward through the whole of this life. Every work of Providence, every communication of grace, every afflictive dispensation, and every joyous occurrence, is intended to advance it; that so at last the soul of the Believer may be altogether "worthy to stand before" the King of kings, and to be admitted to the closest fellowship with him for ever and ever.]

This work completed, she is introduced "into the palace of her Lord"—

^d Eph. iv. 22, 24.

^e Rom. xiii. 14.

^f 1 John ii. 6.

^g 1 John iv. 17.

^h Esther ii. 12, 13.

ⁱ Eph. v. 25—27.

[It was customary for a number of bridesmaids to attend upon the bride, in order to welcome her to her destined home^k. Accordingly it is said, "The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought with her to the King's palace." Even here, whenever any are united unto the Lord, many, both of saints and angels, are ready to congratulate them on the blissful occasion. And how much more will this be the case, when those who are espoused to him in this world shall be brought to consummate their nuptials in the realms of bliss! We read of angels waiting upon Lazarus to bear his spirit to Abraham's bosom. So at the departure of every saint we may well conceive of multitudes of angels and of their former friends coming forth to welcome their arrival. And O! what joy will fill every soul! It is said, "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought:" and we may see in the book of Revelations the whole ceremony pass, as it were, before our eyes. "I heard the voice of a great multitude, saying, Allelujah! Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the white linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb^l." Yes, blessed are they indeed, whether in the character of the spouse or her attendants: for though on earth they are different, in heaven they are the same; the one being the collective body of the Church, of which the others are the individual members. This representation, it must be confessed, is figurative: but under the figure there is a reality: for, as the Scripture says, "These are the true sayings of God^m!"]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet been espoused to Christ—

[Let it not be forgotten, that this is a very common figure in Scripture to represent the surrender of the soul to God. To his Church of old, God said by the prophet Hosea, "Thou shalt abide for me many days; (referring, like our text, to the purifications preparatory to nuptials;) thou shalt not play the harlot; and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for theeⁿ." And again; "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies: I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord^o." In the New Testament also every believer is spoken

^k Matt. xxv. 1.

^l Rev. xix. 6—9.

^m Rev. xix. 9.

ⁿ Hos. iii. 3.

^o Hos. ii. 19, 20.

of in this view: "I have espoused you to one Husband," says St. Paul, "that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ¹." Know ye then, that if you have never solemnly engaged yourselves to Christ, as a virgin does to the object of her affections, and so pledged yourselves, as not for a moment to admit a rival to your heart, you are not yet Christians indeed: you may bear the name; but you have no just title to the character. I call upon you therefore to do this without delay. And, if you desire to postpone this necessary act, I ask, Whom have you found so worthy of your affections as the Lord Jesus Christ? Who has done so much for you to deserve them? — — — and who will ever make you so rich a return? — — — Say not, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us²:" for there is none to be compared with Him, either in heaven or on earth. "He is fairer than the children of men³:" "He is the chiefest among ten thousand:" "He is altogether lovely⁴." O, rest not, till with holy confidence you can say, "This is my Beloved, and this is my Friend, O daughters of Jerusalem⁵." And so set yourselves from this moment to prepare yourselves for him, that he may shortly "bring you to his banqueting-house, and his banner over you be love⁶."

2. Those who profess to stand in the relation of his Spouse—

[Look forward for the period when he will come and take you to himself. The precise hour of his arrival is not known: but it will not be very long, at all events. In the mean time, let your preparation for him be diligent and unintermitted. Seek to be daily more and more "glorious within," and to have your clothing of wrought gold ever ready; so that if his arrival be ever so sudden, he may not find you unprepared for his call. Be jealous over yourselves; and forgive me if I also be jealous over you, in relation to this matter. You know how "the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety" even in Paradise: and you may be sure that he will use his utmost efforts to "corrupt you from the simplicity that is in Christ⁷." Be on your guard therefore, lest either in principle or in practice you turn aside from him. He has numberless instruments whom he employs as his agents to deceive the world; "deceitful workers, who can transform themselves into the Apostles of Christ; as he himself also is not unfrequently transformed into an angel of light⁸." But entreat of God to keep you: beg of him to "hedge up your way with thorns, and even to

¹ 2 Cor. xi. 2.

² Cant. v. 10, 16.

³ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

⁴ Cant. v. 9.

⁵ Cant. v. 16.

⁶ 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14.

⁷ Ps. xlv. 2.

⁸ Cant. ii. 4.

build up a wall around you, that, if you should for a moment incline to follow after your former lovers — — —, you may not be able to find your paths." If unhappily you have gone in pursuit of them — — —, implore of God, that "you may never find them; or, having found, may never overtake them:" or, if you have overtaken them — — —, separate yourselves instantly from them, and say, "I will go and return to my first husband; for then it was better with me than now^z" — — —]

^z Hos. ii. 6, 7.

DLXXIX.

THE RIVER OF GOD.

Ps. xlv. 4. *There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.*

FREQUENTLY, in the Holy Scriptures, is God compared to a fountain: in conformity with which idea, the blessings of salvation which flow from him may well be called "a river." To the Israelites in the wilderness, there was given a stream which followed them in all their journeys: and to the Church, at this day also, is "a river opened for the refreshment of all who travel Zion-ward." Innumerable are the necessities of God's people in this dreary wilderness; and the "troubles" with which they have to contend are often so great as to make it appear as if "the earth itself were removed, and the mountains were carried into the midst of the sea." But God is with his people; and the river which attends their steps supplies their every want. "The whole city of God is gladdened by it, and especially the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High:" for the nearer any one's access to God is, the more abundant are the communications made to him of grace and peace.

The exalted character given of this river will justify a minute inquiry respecting it. Let us notice then, I. The source from whence it issues—

[Whence can this be, but from God himself? But on this subject we are not left to form conjectures: for David says, "With God is the fountain of life^a." And St. John says,

^a Ps. xxxvi. 9.

that "there was shewn to him a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb^b." From God, as the primary cause of all good, and from the Lamb, who has "purchased the Church with his blood," and who is constituted "Head over all things to his Church," and has all fulness treasured up in him for his people's use; from our adorable Emmanuel, I say, all the blessings of salvation flow. The Father, of his own sovereign will, opened a way for the bestowment of them: the Son, by his atoning blood, procured them for us: and the Holy Spirit imparts them to the souls of men: so that from our Tri-une God does this river altogether proceed. In truth, it was typified by the waters that flowed from the rock in Horeb, and supplied the camp of Israel forty years: "They all drank the same spiritual drink," says the Apostle; "for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ^c."]

We may next notice,

II. The channel in which it flows—

[It is in the ordinances of the Gospel that all spiritual blessings are dispensed. For thus saith the prophet: "It shall come to pass in that day, that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters; and a fountain shall come forth of the house of the Lord, and shall water the valley of Shittim^d." To the house of God, those who are athirst come, that they may drink of its refreshing streams. "O God, thou art my God," saith holy David; "early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary^e." Yes; these are "the golden pipes, by which the golden oil is communicated from the olive-trees" to every lamp in the sanctuary^f. See, in the days of old, what blessings attended the ministration of the word, accompanied as it was by an effusion of the Spirit from on high: nothing could withstand its power! So it still "sweeps away from men every refuge of lies, and overflows their hiding places^g;" at the same time that it bears them up, as in the ark, and saves them from the deluge that will destroy the world.]

We may not unprofitably direct your attention yet further to,

III. The depths of "its streams"—

[The Prophet Ezekiel refers so particularly to this, that we must on no account omit the mention of it. He speaks of

^b Rev. xxii. 1.

^d Joel iii. 18. with Isai. ii. 3. latter part.

^f Zech. iv. 11, 12.

^c 1 Cor. x. 4.

^e Ps. lxxiii. 1, 2.

^g Isai. xxviii. 17.

this river as proceeding "from under the threshold of the sanctuary, and *from the side of the altar*," where the sacrifices were offered. Being brought to it by the heavenly messenger who had been sent to instruct him, he was made to pass through its waters, which, in the first instance, rose only "to his ankles." On being brought to another place, he found the "waters up to his knees;" and, at another place, "up to his loins;" and then, a little further on, it was "out of the depth of any man^h." Now this gives a most just and beautiful representation of the Gospel; which, in our first approach to it, is so shallow, that the veriest child may walk in it with perfect ease: but, as we advance in it, we find yet deeper truths; till, at last, its mysteries are unfathomable by any created intelligence; "so unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding outⁱ." Nothing can be more simple than the great leading truth of salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: a child that can but just "run, may read," and "a wayfaring-man, though a fool, may understand, it." But when we attempt to explore the love of Christ displayed in it, we find "a length and breadth and depth and height that infinitely surpass any finite comprehension^k."

But of its chief excellencies we must especially mark,]

IV. The salubrity of its waters—

[The Prophet Zechariah, especially referring to the Gospel, says, "It shall be in that day, that *living waters* shall go out from Jerusalem^l." And in the passage before quoted from the Prophet Ezekiel, their efficacy is fully declared: "It shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed, and every thing shall live whither the river cometh^m." Here then we see, that they give health to the diseased, and life to the dead. Verily, there is no disease which shall not be removed by the use of them. Naaman thought that "Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, might be as serviceable as the waters of Israelⁿ:" and, in like manner, many vainly hope to heal themselves by the application of carnal remedies to their souls. But it is this river only that can purify us from our sins; and the man that washes in it, how leprous soever he may have been, shall instantly experience its healing efficacy. Nor shall its virtue be confined to a single patient: none shall have cause to complain, like the man at Bethesda's pool, that one less indigent or more highly-favoured than himself has been beforehand

^h Ezek. xlvii. 1—5.

ⁱ Rom. xi. 33.

^k Eph. iii. 18, 19.

^l Zech. xiv. 8.

^m Ezek. xlvii. 9.

ⁿ 2 Kings v. 12.

with him, and exhausted all its virtue^o. Not a human being shall fail of obtaining all he needs, if only he apply the remedy in faith: "The fountain is opened for sin, and for uncleanness^p: and its powers are yet as effectual as on the day that David washed in it^q, or the murderers of the Lord of glory sprinkled its waters upon their souls^r. It will even give life to the dead. When a dead man was cast into the sepulchre of Elisha, the very instant his body touched the bones of the prophet, he revived, and stood upon his feet^s. And shall not these waters, sprinkled on the soul, produce a like effect? Has not our blessed Lord himself affirmed, "I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die?" Let it not be thought that the Gospel has lost one atom of its power: for though men be in a state so desperate, that, as in Ezekiel's vision, their bones are reduced to dust, and scattered over the face of the earth, yet shall they "rise a great army," as soon as ever the Word and Spirit of God shall be applied with power to their souls^u.

That, however, of which our text more particularly speaks, is,]

V. Its efficacy to "gladden the whole city of God"—

[In two respects does it contribute to the happiness of every citizen of Zion; namely, *by the defence it affords*, and *by the refreshment it administers*. Common rivers, if they afford protection against those who have no means of crossing them, give, in many instances, a greater facility of assault, either by means of large fleets, which transport an enemy with ease to any point he may choose to attack; or by smaller vessels, whereby he may come suddenly and unperceived, and disembark upon its very banks. But this river admits not of access by any such means. Hear the account given of it by the Prophet Isaiah: "Look upon *Zion, the city of our solemnities*; (the *city* spoken of in our text:) thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken: for there the glorious Lord will be unto us *a place of broad rivers and streams*, wherein shall go *no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby*^x." We may conceive of a river which, by its shoals and cataracts, bids defiance to vessels of any kind; and such is that which encompasses our Zion, and keeps it from every assault. At the same time it supplies the wants of the besieged in rich abundance. From the moment that any one tastes its refreshing streams, "he thirsts no more:" he has

^o John v. 7.

^p Zech. xiii. 1.

^q Ps. li. 7.

^r Acts ii. 41.

^s 2 Kings xiii. 21.

^t John xi. 25, 26.

^u Ezek. xxxvii. 1—10.

^x Isai. xxxiii. 20, 21.

within himself, as it were, “a well of water springing up unto everlasting life^y.” Such perfect satisfaction both to soul and body will these waters give, that all who drink of them will have a foretaste of heaven itself: “they draw water out of this fountain with inexpressible joy^z,” “and they are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of God’s house; and he makes them drink of the river of *his* pleasures^a.” It is doubtless a strong expression to say that this is a foretaste of heaven: but look into heaven, and you will find the very same river running there, and the blest inhabitants partaking of it: for “the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne is feeding them, and leads them to *living fountains of water*; and God wipes away all tears from their eyes^b.”]

Let me on this sublime subject found an ADDRESS,

1. To those who are in circumstances of difficulty or danger—

[It was after a deliverance from some impending calamity that this psalm was written: and from that deliverance the Psalmist inferred, that they who trust in God have nothing to fear. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea: though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.” To every inhabitant of Zion this sweet assurance belongs: “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early^c.” Know then your privilege, Brethren: and amidst all the storms and dangers to which you are exposed, see your God as an impassable river around you; or, varying the metaphor, as “a wall of fire round about you, and the glory in the midst of you^d.” With such a protector, “can any weapon that is formed against you prosper?” You may bid defiance to every enemy; and say, with confidence, “If God be for me, who can be against me?”]

2. To those who are seeking their happiness in the things of time and sense—

[Infatuated people, who are “forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out cisterns for yourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water^e!” when will you see your folly? when will you suffer your continued disappointments to instruct you? If you will not believe the word of God, methinks you might learn from your own experience. Did you, from such services, ever receive one single draught that

^y John iv. 13, 14. and vii. 37, 38.

^z Isai. xii. 3.

^a Ps. xxxvi. 8.

^b Rev. vii. 17.

^c ver. 1—5.

^d Zech. ii. 5.

^e Jer. ii. 13.

satisfied you? Have you not, even in the moments of your highest enjoyment, found that you were "labouring for that which could not profit," and that "in the midst of laughter your heart was in heaviness?" Listen, then, to the invitation of the prophet: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price! Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good; and let your soul delight itself in fatness^f." Verily, if ye will come to the Lord Jesus Christ, and "receive out of his fulness" the blessings he has purchased for you, you shall "see the good of his chosen, and rejoice in the gladness of his nation, and shall glory with his inheritance^g."]

^f Isai. lv. 1, 2.

^g Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

DLXXX.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST AN OCCASION FOR JOY.

Ps. xlvii. 5—7. *God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.*

IF we read the Psalms of David without any reference to Christ, we shall have a very imperfect view of their import: but if we consider them as containing many prophetic declarations, we shall find in them a rich mine of evangelical knowledge. The psalm before us is supposed to have been written by David, when he carried up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion^a; and to represent, by that typical event, the ascension of Christ to heaven: and, as that event was celebrated with all possible demonstrations of joy, so we are here exhorted to burst forth in joyful acclamations on account of the exaltation of Christ to his throne in glory.

We shall consider,

I. The event predicted—

Observe,

1. In what exalted terms our blessed Lord is here spoken of—

[Thrice is he called "God:" the incommunicable name

^a 2 Sam. vi. 15.

“Jehovah” is also assigned to him: and he is declared to be the “King” of Zion, and “the King of the whole earth.” Now these are the titles given to him throughout the inspired writings. “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever^b.” The name whereby he is to be called by all his believing people is, “Jehovah, our Righteousness^c.” The prophet Isaiah also says, “Thy Maker is thine Husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called^d.” In the New Testament he is also designated by the same august titles, as “God manifest in the flesh^e,” even “God over all blessed for ever^f.” And it is no little satisfaction to us to see, that the doctrine so essential to our happiness, the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, pervades the whole Scriptures, and bears that prominence in them which might reasonably be expected.]

2. How exactly the representation here given of him in a figure, corresponds with the reality—

[David had triumphed over all his enemies: and now, in order to honour God who had given him the victory, and that he might have the readier access to God on all occasions, he brought the ark, the symbol of the Divine presence, up to Mount Zion, that there in future it might have a fixed abode. But in this he shadowed forth the true ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, “in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Deity,” as ceasing from his labours, and ascending to his throne in glory, there to complete the victories which he had begun on earth. “On his very cross he spoiled all the principalities and powers of darkness, triumphing over them openly in it^g,” and in his ascension he “led them all captive^h,” and left his people to contend only with a vanquished enemyⁱ. He being now upon his throne, we can have access to him at all times, and may obtain from him all the succour that we stand in need of.]

But this leads me to notice, in reference to this event,
II. The interest we have in it—

If we considered it in no other view than as a recompence to Christ, we should contemplate it with joy. But it is a source of the richest possible blessings to us. Consider,

This ascended Saviour is our King—

[This ascension is a *proof and evidence to us that he has triumphed* over all his enemies. He unites these two together, the one as the effect and consequence of the other; “I over-

^b Ps. xlv. 6. with Heb. i. 8.

^c Jer. xxiii. 6.

^d Isai. liv. 5.

^e 1 Tim. iii. 16.

^f Rom. ix. 5.

^g Col. ii. 14, 15.

^h Eph. iv. 8.

ⁱ John xvi. 11.

came, and am set down with my Father upon his throne^k." But farther, it is a *pledge that he will give us the victory* also over all our enemies; He is constituted Head over all things to the Church for this very end and purpose, even "that he might fill all things^l," and perfect for his believing people all which their infinitely diversified circumstances can require^m. His being "King over all the earth" abundantly shews us, that he is able to protect us from every adversary, and to supply our every want, and to make us "more than conquerors" over all the enemies of our salvation.]

Hence it is that the Psalmist so urgently renews his exhortation to us to "sing praise" unto him—

[In another psalm he says, "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their Kingⁿ." The enemies of Christ have rather reason to tremble: for he will surely "break them all in pieces like a potter's vessel^o." But his people have reason to rejoice, as Solomon plainly intimates; "Arise, O Lord God, into thy resting place, thou and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O Lord God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in thy goodness^p." In a word, "God has raised up his Son and given him glory, on purpose that our faith and hope may be in him;"^q and therefore we shall be inexcusable if we make not this improvement of the subject that is now brought before us.]

Mark then with all due attention,

III. Our duty in the contemplation of it—

Five times does David in this short passage repeat his exhortation to us to sing praises to our ascended Lord. This therefore we should do,

1. With all possible ardour—

[This is not a duty to be performed in a cold and formal manner; but with all the powers and faculties of our souls. David's frame of mind should be ours: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name^r." And again, "I will extol thee, O God, my King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever^s." And again, "Praise the Lord, O my soul: while I live will I praise the Lord; I will sing praises unto my God, while I have my being^t." To this effect St. Paul exhorts us also; "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice^u." "Rejoice evermore; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you^x." To comply

^k Rev. iii. 21.

^l Eph. iv. 10.

^m Eph. iv. 11—13.

ⁿ Ps. cxlix. 2.

^o Ps. ii. 9.

^p 2 Chron. vi. 41.

^q 1 Pet. i. 21.

^r Ps. ciii. 1.

^s Ps. cxlv. 1, 2.

^t Ps. cxlvi. 1, 2.

^u Phil. iv. 4.

^x 1 Thess. v. 16, 18.

fully with the exhortation of the text, praise should be our one employment from day to day, and the very element in which we live. So far as our imperfect state will admit of it, the dispositions and habits of the heavenly hosts should be in such constant exercise with us, that earth should be the very foretaste of heaven itself.]

2. With all due intelligence—

[Every duty should be performed in a wise and intelligent manner. “Whether we pray or sing, it should be with the spirit and with the understanding also^y.” Without fervour, our sacrifice would be lame; and without understanding, blind: and God could never be pleased with such offerings as these^z. The heart and mind must go together, to make our offering a reasonable service. In singing praises therefore to our ascended Saviour, we should distinctly view him, not as a private person, but in his public capacity as our Head and Representative. We should have respect to him also as our Advocate and Intercessor, who is “living on purpose to make intercession for us.” We should moreover consider him as “our forerunner,” who is “gone before, to prepare a place for us, and will shortly come again to take us to himself, that where he is we may be also.” These are the truths which the occasion suggests, and these the thoughts which should infuse the utmost possible fervour into our devotions. Whilst therefore a fire burns in our bosoms, let us be sure that it be taken from the altar of our God, and that the sacrifice we present to him be that of an intelligent, as well as of a devout, worshipper.]

In the review of this subject we cannot but see,

1. The blessedness of real piety—

[I put the question to any living man; Can a person be otherwise than happy, that lives in the state inculcated in my text? — — —]

2. How little there is of true piety upon earth—

[Take this frame of mind as the true test of piety, and you will find as much of piety amongst the very beasts, as amongst the world at large, yea, and more too: for “the ox does know his owner, and the very ass his master’s crib; whilst God’s professing people neither know nor consider their heavenly Benefactor.”

And how lamentably do even good men live below their privileges! Let the very best amongst us compare his experience with the frame that is here inculcated, and he must confess he has abundant reason to blush and be ashamed. Dear Brethren, let us awake to our duty, and never rest till we have attained such a measure of habitual and intelligent devotion, as shall be an earnest and foretaste of the felicity of heaven.]

^y 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

^z Mal. i. 8.

DLXXXI.

THE CHURCH'S SECURITY IN GOD.

Ps. xlviii. 12—14. *Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof: mark ye well her bulwarks; consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.*

MEN read the Bible in order that they may know what they are to *do*; and this is well: but they should read the Bible also in order that they may know what they are to *expect*: for that blessed book is no less a record of their privileges, than of their duties. It is of privileges that our text speaks. The psalm evidently celebrates some triumph over confederate kings^a: and it was probably written on the occasion of Jehoshaphat's deliverance from the confederate armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir; who, through the special providence of God, turned their arms against each other, and left Jehoshaphat nothing to do but to collect the spoil^b. That, as might be expected, was a season of very exalted joy to all Judah: and the circumstances altogether correspond very exactly with the intimations given in this psalm. The security of Zion under Divine protection is that which is particularly specified in the text: and we are called to notice it for the benefit of future generations.

Let us consider,

I. The survey proposed—

Whatever strength might be in the fortifications of Jerusalem, the writer of this psalm evidently looked beyond them to God, who alone is the security of his people. Moreover, Zion was a type of the Church of God, which is indeed “the mountain of his holiness, beautiful for situation, and the joy of the whole earth; and in whose palaces he is well known for a refuge^c.” Let us then “walk about her, and tell her towers, and mark well her bulwarks.” Let us mark the bulwarks,

^a ver. 4.

^b 2 Chron. xx. 22—25.

^c ver. 1—3.

1. Of the Jewish Church—

[This was founded on the *purposes*, the *perfections*, and the *promises* of God; and from them were derived her strength and her security.

In a season of great alarm and terror, the prophet being asked, “What shall we answer the messengers of the nation,” who come to apprise us of the approach of the Philistine armies? His answer was, “Tell them that *the Lord hath founded Zion*, and that the poor of his people shall trust in it^d.” To this St. Paul adds, “*The foundation of the Lord standeth sure*, having this seal, *The Lord knoweth them that are his*^e.” God had determined from all eternity that he would have a Church and people in the world: and hence it was that neither Pharaoh in Egypt could prevent, nor all the nations of Canaan could obstruct, the establishment of Mount Zion: for “God’s counsel must stand; and he will do all his will^f.”

For the preservation of his Church, every perfection of the Deity was pledged. Whilst his wisdom was engaged to disconcert, and his power to defeat, all her enemies, his truth and faithfulness formed a barrier that could not be broken through: so that, till by the iniquities of his people he was constrained to depart from them, he was “a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in the midst of them^g,” and every attribute of his was “a chamber in which they might lie down in perfect peace^h.”

Often it appeared as if his promise in relation to them would fail: but not a jot or tittle of his word ever did fail: for “he was not a man that he could lie, or the son of man that he could repent.” And, after the people had been forty years established in the land of Canaan, Joshua appealed to them, that “not one good thing had failed of all that God had spoken concerning them, but that every thing had come to pass according to his promiseⁱ.”]

2. Of the Christian Church—

[Our Zion also has “her towers and her bulwarks,” even *the finished work of Christ*, and *the office of the Holy Spirit*, and *the economy of Redemption from first to last*.

The Lord Jesus undertook to purchase unto himself a peculiar people, even with the inestimable price of his own blood: and never did he cease from his work, till he could say, “It is finished^k.” Every thing that was necessary to expiate our guilt, every thing that was necessary to work out a righteousness for his redeemed people, every thing that was necessary

^d Isai. xiv. 32.^e 2 Tim. ii. 19.^f Isai. xlvi. 10.^g Zech. ii. 5.^h Isai. xxvi. 20.ⁱ Josh. xxiii. 14.^k John xix. 30.

to satisfy the demands of law and justice, all he completed perfectly: and having fulfilled his covenant-engagements with the Father, it cannot be but that "he should see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied," even in the promised seed, who should prolong their days, whilst "the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands¹."

True it is, that in vain would Christ have died for his Church and people, if the Holy Spirit had not undertaken to apply to their souls the redemption which he has wrought out for them. But from the day of Pentecost to this very hour, he has not failed "to glorify Christ, by taking of the things that are his, and shewing them unto men^m." He finds men dead indeed; but he quickens them to a new and heavenly life: he gives them eyes, to see; and ears, to hear; and hearts to feel the truths which he has revealed to them: and "where he has begun a work of grace, he fails not to carry it on, and to perfect it until the day of Christⁿ." And hence it is that all the powers of hell have never been able to prevail against them.

Were the Church to be destroyed, the whole plan of Redemption, as devised by the Father, executed by the Son, and applied by the Spirit, would fail; and the Lord Jesus Christ himself would be robbed of all his recompence and all his glory. But, whoever surveys "these towers," will know assuredly, that "Mount Zion cannot be moved, but abideth for ever^o." Yes, "God's righteousness shall be for ever, and his salvation from generation to generation^p."]]

3. Of the Church of which we are members—

[*As against the world*, the Church of England has no other security than what is common to every true Church of Christ: but as *against her professed members*, who would despoil her of her glory and her excellency, and would sap her very foundations by the introduction of false doctrines into her community, we have towers, and bulwarks, in which we glory, and which we desire you all attentively to survey. "Come, and let us walk round our Zion, and mark well her defences!" See there *her Articles*; how plain, how strong, how scriptural! there is no truth that is not there established: and though she has many false sons who would surrender them up to the enemy, there is not one which they have ever been able to impair, nor one in which her faithful people do not feel complete security.

Next, behold *her Homilies*, formed by men of God who knew what assaults would be made against her. There are not wanting men who complain, that these are antiquated, and need repair. But they are as firm and immovable as at the first hour

¹ Isai. liii. 10, 11.

^m John xvi. 14.

ⁿ Phil. i. 6.

^o Ps. cxxv. 1.

^p Isai. li. 8.

they were constructed: and they defy all the assaults, whether of traitorous friends, or open foes.

Then view *her Liturgy*.—Next to the Bible, it stands the wonder of the world. Never was there such a composition for the use of those who would worship God in spirit and in truth: and, whilst piety shall continue to characterize the Children of Zion, this will be their joy, their glory, their defence. They may be derided, as too holy, and too precise: but, whilst they can point to her expressions both of prayer and praise, they will feel that they are vindicated against the whole world, and are in a bulwark that is absolutely impregnable.]

The end of this survey is, “that we may tell it to the generation following:” which shews, that, both for their sakes and our own, we should contemplate,

II. The consolation arising from it—

What was written so many centuries ago, belongs no less to us than it did to those for whose instruction it was originally composed. It calls our attention to the God of Zion, and reminds us of,

1. Our interest in him—

[“This God is our God for ever and ever.” He is *the same in himself*; and bears the same relation to us; and feels the same concern for us as he did for his Church of old.

“He changeth not:” “he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” “With him is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” And is he not *our* Father, *our* Friend, *our* Redeemer, *our* God? When did he cease to sustain these relations to his Church and people? Or when did he cease to be mindful of the offices which these relations imply? If it be said, He has ceased to work miracles; we grant it: but has he therefore withdrawn himself from the Church and from the world, so as to shut up his loving-kindness from us, and to be gracious to us no more? Were we indeed to believe the infidel and ungodly world, we should say with them, that “God has forsaken the earth:” but we know the contrary: we know, that if God’s presence and agency be less visible than formerly, they are not a whit less real; and that he feels for his people at this hour, as much as ever he did at any period of the world. “He knows their sorrows^q,” and “in all their afflictions is afflicted^r:” nor can an enemy touch so much as one of them, without touching “the apple of his eye^s.”

Take this then into your consideration, in connexion with the foregoing survey. The same God as watched so tenderly

^q Exod. iii. 7.

^r Isai. lxiii. 9.

^s Zech. ii. 8.

over his people of old, is your God; and watches over you, with the same care as he did over them. His purposes have as much respect to you as to them: his perfections are all engaged as much for you, as for them: his promises are made no less to you, than to them. For you the work of Christ, the office of the Spirit, and the whole economy of Redemption, have secured blessings, as well as for them. And the same Spirit who was poured forth in such abundant measure upon our Reformers, and endued them with such consummate wisdom and grace, is ready to "work upon your hearts," and to "fulfil in you also all the good pleasure of God's goodness, and the work of faith with power; so that the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ^t." I say then, Know from the records of the Church of old what a God you have to go to, and that "this God is your God for ever and ever."]

2. Our expectations from him—

["He will be our guide even unto death." See how remarkably he guided Jehoshaphat on the occasion which we suppose to be more particularly referred to: he told Jehoshaphat where his enemies were, at what precise spot he should find them, and when he should go against them: *twice* was it repeated, "To-morrow go out against them^u." So he knows exactly where our enemies are, and what they design against us, and how they are to be met: and though he will not vanquish them without our fighting, yet, if we go forth against them in dependence on him, "he will be with us," and will subdue them before us. Suppose our most formidable enemies now in array against us; and see in what way he will interpose in our behalf: "Like as a lion," says he, "and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the Lord of Hosts come down to fight for Mount Zion, and for the hill thereof. As birds flying, so will the Lord of Hosts defend Jerusalem: defending also, he will deliver it; and passing over, he will preserve it^x." Here are no less than three figures, rising in a climax one above the other, to illustrate the zeal and efficacy with which he will interpose for us. The first is that of a lion, who, when devouring his prey, will not be intimidated by the noise of shepherds, how numerous soever they may be: (This marks *the determination* with which Jehovah will prosecute our cause.) The next is that of a parent bird, who, when she sees a bird of prey hovering over her young, and ready to dart upon them, will fly with the utmost rapidity to intercept the devourer's

^t 2 Thess. i. 11, 12. ^u 2 Chron. xx. 16. ^x Isai. xxxi. 4, 5.

assault, even at the peril of her own life: (This shews *the tender interest* which Jehovah will take in our welfare, and the efforts he will make in our behalf.) The last is that of the attendant Angel (the Angel of the Covenant), who accompanied the destroying angel through the whole land of Egypt, and stepped forward, wherever he saw a blood-besprinkled door, to prevent him from executing his commission there: and so effectually constrained him to “*pass over*” the houses of the Israelites, that, whilst in every house in Egypt the first-born of man and beast was slain, not one of either was slain in any house belonging to the Children of Israel: (This shews *the efficacy* with which Jehovah will espouse our cause.) Now then what have we to fear with such a Protector? Let men or devils combine against us, we need not give ourselves one moment’s concern. Under all such circumstances, the Psalmist’s language should be ours: “God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God; the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High: God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early^y.” In a word, we may “cast all our care on Him who careth for us^z,” assured, that, “if we only make God our refuge and habitation, no evil shall befall us^a.”]

APPLICATION—

1. Search then into your privileges, that you may have the true enjoyment of them—

[Think of people in a besieged city: with what delight would they view the towers and bulwarks which they had reason to believe no enemy could destroy! And will not *you*, who have the Lord himself for your defence? Consider the representation which he gives of himself, as a broad river, so broad that it cannot be passed but in boats; yet so tempestuous, that no small vessel can live upon it; and so full of rocks and shoals, that no large vessel can navigate it^b; which consequently, being impassable, secures to you, under all circumstances, the most perfect tranquillity: consider this, I say, and tell me, whether you ought not to be ever rejoicing in your God? I would that all of you should be fully acquainted with your privileges; and that you should be frequently “walking about Zion, and telling her towers, and marking well her bulwarks, and considering attentively her palaces” in which you are lodged and feasted from day to day; that so you may be happy

^y Ps. xlv. 1—5.

^a Ps. xci. 9, 10.

^z 1 Pet. v. 7.

^b Isai. xxxiii. 20—22.

in your own souls, and “God may dwell in you, whilst you thus dwell in him!” For, if you thus “know in Whom you have believed, and that He is able to keep that which you have committed to him^c,” you cannot but be happy: since he has expressly said, “I will keep *him* in perfect peace whose mind is staid on me, because he trusteth in me^d.”]

2. Search into them, that you may make them known to the rising generation—

[We should not be contented to be happy alone, but should desire as far as possible to diffuse happiness all around us. To the rising generation in particular we are bound to transmit the benefits which we have received. The knowledge of salvation is a sacred deposit committed to us for that very end^e — — — It is scarcely to be conceived how much more profitable to young people the preached Gospel would be, if they were well instructed at home. We teach our children what shall conduce to the advancement of their worldly interests; and shall we neglect the welfare of their souls^f? — — — In particular, let us endeavour to impress their minds with the knowledge of God, and his perfections; of Christ, and his offices; of the Holy Spirit, and his operations; that so they also may have God for *their* God, and *their* guide, and *their* portion, for ever and ever.]

^c 2 Tim. i. 12.

^d Isai. xxvi. 3.

^e Ps. lxxviii. 5—7.

^f If this were the subject of a Sermon for a *Charity School*, or *Sunday School*, this idea should be considerably enlarged.

DLXXXII.

THE FOLLY OF WORLDLY MEN.

Ps. xlix. 13. *This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings.*

IT is generally supposed that wisdom pertains chiefly, if not exclusively, to those who are proficient in arts and science: but learning and wisdom are by no means necessarily connected with each other: they may exist separately, each in a high degree: and, in fact, there is nothing more common than to behold persons of the most extensive erudition acting the part of fools in God's sight, whilst persons destitute of all human acquirements are “walking wisely before him in a perfect way.” Wisdom, properly viewed, is a conformity of the mind and will to the mind and will of God; and it

exists precisely in proportion as this conformity exists: the resemblance is wisdom, the deviation folly. Hence we see why David, at the commencement of this psalm, calls, in so solemn a manner, persons of every age and quality to attend to his instructions; and professes to teach them lessons of the profoundest wisdom, when there is not any thing recondite, or any thing uncommon, in the whole psalm. The truths contained in this divine ode are level with every capacity, and therefore might seem to be improperly ushered in with so pompous an introduction: but they are at the root of all practical religion; and they draw a broad line of distinction between those who are wise, and those who are unwise, in the estimation of their God.

The whole subject of the psalm will come properly before us, whilst we consider,

I. The way of worldly men—

It may naturally be expected, that “they who are of the world, should speak of the world,” and seek it as their most desired portion: and they are described as doing so in the psalm before us.

They are altogether engrossed with earthly things—

[Worldly distinction is the one object of their ambition. For this end chiefly both wealth and honour are pursued^a. Having attained these things in a considerable degree, they bless themselves, as possessing somewhat wherein they may trust^b, somewhat that will make them happy for a long time to come, and somewhat that shall transmit their names to posterity as worthy of admiration^c — — —]

But “this their way is their folly”—

[Wealth and honour are far from affording the satisfaction that is expected from them: they will not ward off sickness and death, either from ourselves or others^d: nor can they follow us into the eternal world^e. The moment we die, as very speedily we all must^f, nothing of them remains to us but the fearful responsibility attached to the possession of them. Instead of “profiting us in the day of wrath,” they will rather augment our final condemnation, if they have not been improved for God as talents committed to us. In the parable of

^a ver. 18.

^d ver. 7—10.

^b ver. 6.

^e ver. 17.

^c ver. 11.

^f ver. 12, 14.

the Rich Man and Lazarus we behold the bitter consequences of living only to the flesh: the man who has his good things in this life, will want in the eternal world a drop of water to cool his tongue: "he will never see light," but be consigned over to the everlasting regions of darkness and despair^g. We wonder not therefore, that the man, who, because he had gotten much, thought of nothing but his temporal enjoyments, "Soul, take thine ease," is by God himself derided as a fool: "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee."]

Yet, such is the influence of example, that, notwithstanding the folly of such conduct is visible to all, the same is pursued by every succeeding generation—

[No one who considers for a moment the issue of such conduct to those who have gone before them, can doubt the folly of it: for, whatever rank or station men held in this life, or whatever may be said of them now they are gone, what remains to them of their wealth or honour, or what enjoyment have they of their posthumous fame? If we extol them ever so high, they feel no satisfaction; and if we condemn them ever so harshly, they are unconscious of either shame or pain: they are interested in nothing but in the quality of their actions as approved or condemned by their Judge. This we all know; yet no sooner have we a prospect of wealth and honour ourselves, than our desires are as ardent, our expectations as sanguine, and our dependence as unqualified, as that of any who have gone before us. The conviction of their folly only floats in our imagination, but never descends as a principle into our hearts. We see and blame their folly; yet approve in practice what in theory we condemn.]

As contrasted with this, let us consider,

II. The way which true wisdom prescribes—

In verse 15, the Psalmist gives us that precise view of the subject which he had before characterized as replete with wisdom: "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for he shall receive me;" that is, Whilst worldly men have no prospects beyond the grave, I look forward to a happy eternity, which shall be the portion of all who truly serve God. Hence then we see what way true wisdom prescribes: it teaches us,

1. To regard this world in its connexion with eternity—

[View this world as the whole state of man's existence;

^g ver. 19.

and they speak well, who say, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." But this world is a mere passage to a better; it is an inn, at which we sojourn for a night, in our way to a better country. A person tarrying only for a few hours is not greatly elated, if his accommodations be good; nor greatly depressed, if they be bad. He considers, in either case, that it is not his home; that his comfort or discomfort is very transient; and that it will be time enough to look for unmixed enjoyments, when he shall have reached his Father's house. Moreover, this world must be considered as a state of preparation for a better; every thing that is done here being an occasion of increased happiness or augmented misery to all eternity. In this view of the world, every pain and every pleasure acquires a new aspect. The things that are so highly prized by ungodly men lose their value; and every thing is esteemed good or bad, according as it quickens or retards us in our Christian course. Hence true wisdom says, "Love not the world^h," "neither be of itⁱ;" but "be crucified to it, and let it be as one crucified to you^k."

2. To follow the footsteps of the saints of old—

[There are those who have gone before us, whose ways were not folly, though they might be esteemed foolish by those who were themselves blinded by Satan. "Abraham went out from his kindred and his country, not knowing whither he went^l:" Moses refused all the wealth and honour that Egypt could afford, that he might participate in the lot of God's persecuted and despised people^m: many saints "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substanceⁿ:" Matthew left his lucrative employment to follow Christ^o: Paul suffered the loss of all things for Christ^p; and after having engaged in the Christian course, attended to nothing but his progress in it, straining every nerve to win and secure the prize^q. All of these would be thought by the world to carry religion to a very culpable excess: but they acted with consummate wisdom, each in the part he took: they all "chose the good part, which could not be taken away from them." Let any one who reflects on the *present* state of these eminent saints, say, whether "*their way was folly?*" If it was not; if, on the contrary, it accorded with the dictates of true wisdom, then let all not only "approve their *sayings*," but imitate their *doings* also, and "be followers of them, as they were of Christ."]

ADVICE—

1. Guard against the influence of bad example—

^h John ii. 15, 16.

ⁱ John xvii. 14, 16.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

^l Heb. xi. 8.

^m Heb. xi. 24—26.

ⁿ Heb. x. 34.

^o Matt. ix. 9.

^p Phil. iii. 8.

^q Phil. iii. 13, 14.

[There is nothing urged with greater confidence to deter young persons from a religious course, or to draw them back again to the world, than example. They are told from time to time what such and such persons do; and can this be wrong? But whoever they are who are proposed to us for examples, we have only one question to ask; Did they regulate their conduct according to the revealed will of God? and was it the one labour of their lives to walk as Christ walked? If this was not the case, it signifies not who they were, or what they did: "their way was their folly;" and instead of taking them as examples to follow, we should rather regard them as monuments to warn us against impending ruin. If the number and respectability of the persons be urged, let us remember, that to "walk according to the course of this world, is to walk according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." "Christ died to deliver us from this present evil world:" we must therefore leave the broad road that leadeth to destruction, and walk in "the narrow way that leadeth unto life." True it is, that "if we do well unto ourselves (in advancing our own temporal interests), men will speak good of us^r:" but it is of little consequence what men speak or think: nothing will be of any lasting benefit to us, but the approbation of our God^s.]

2. Cleave to Him who alone is able to redeem our souls—

[If man cannot redeem his brother from temporal death, much less can he the soul from spiritual and eternal death: the price required for that is more than all the creatures in earth or heaven are able to pay^t. But Christ has paid the mighty ransom: with his own "precious blood," he has redeemed us from sin and Satan, from death and hell. Seek him then, and you are richer than ten thousand worlds could make you. In him you have "durable riches, and righteousness." Go to him, and he will give you "gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich." After him your desires cannot be too ardent; your expectations from him cannot be too enlarged; your dependence on him cannot be too entire and confident. On that side you need not fear excess. And if the world deride your way as folly, regard it not: they will soon alter their sentiments: the moment they enter into the eternal world, they will know infallibly who were wise and who were fools: and when they meet you at the judgment-seat of Christ, they will say, "We fools counted their life madness:" their reproaches then will be turned upon themselves, and their one subject of lamentation will be, that they

^r ver. 18.^s 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.^t ver. 7—9.

“approved the sayings” of a blind ungodly world, instead of the infallible sayings of their God. This is the way to “walk not as fools, but as wise:” and, so walking, you shall surely ere long have the plaudit of your Judge, “Well done, good and faithful servants! enter ye into the joy of your Lord.”]

DLXXXIII.

THE DEGRADED STATE OF MAN.

Ps. xlix. 20. *Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.*

MAN, when first he came out of the hands of his Creator, was perfect; and fit to be God’s vicegerent, if I may so speak, in this lower world. God put all the rest of the creation under him, and gave him dominion over all the work of his hands. But, from the time that man fell, he became degraded in all his faculties, and in many respects like unto the beasts that perish. True, possessing reason, he still held a superiority over them in those things which belong exclusively to the province of reason: but, in every thing which depends on grace, he was reduced to a level with them. To man converted by the grace of God this superiority is restored: but to man in his natural and unregenerate state, even though he be exalted to the highest pinnacle of honour amongst his fellows, this humiliating declaration is fully applicable: “Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.”

He is like them,

I. In his understanding—

In things pertaining to the body, man is far inferior to the brute creation, being excelled by one or other of them in every faculty and power. In agility and strength he is not to be compared with myriads of beasts, both tame and savage: and in all the senses he falls exceedingly below them. His sight, his smell, his taste, his hearing, his feeling, are in no respect equal to that which exists among the different orders of beasts and birds and insects; so that, in all that is corporeal, they are superior to him. In what is intellectual, doubtless he retains his superiority;

though, after all, in ten thousand instances, instinct in them leaves him far behind, and enables them to discern and execute things without number which man with all his attainments can never reach. But it is in things relating to the soul that I am to speak of him: and in these he will be really found as stupid and brutish as the very beasts.

[The beasts do discern, for the most part, what is conducive to their welfare, and distinguish it from that which would prove injurious. But, waving this, I will admit that the beasts discern not the comparative value and excellency of the things around them. And what, I would ask, are the views which men have of sin and holiness, of heaven and earth, of time and eternity? I ask not what their *speculative notions* may be, but what their practical views? Who, in his unregenerate state, regards all earthly things as vain, empty, worthless? Who looks upon sin as hateful and abominable? Who affects holiness as the perfection of his nature, and as a source of the sublimest bliss? Who accounts every thing as dung and dross in comparison of the favour of God, and the enjoyment of the divine presence? *Theoretically*, it is true, men know better than the beasts; but *practically* not a whit more than they; yea, they sink below the beasts in proportion as they act directly contrary to the plainest dictates of their judgment. Unconverted men, notwithstanding they acknowledge a supreme Being, act as much without a reference to his approbation as the very beasts: and hence David describes and addresses them in these humiliating, but most appropriate, terms: "They say, The Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it. Understand, *ye brutish among the people*: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see^a?" Nay, more, the pious Agur, cast down on account of the remains of these infirmities within him, exclaimed, "Surely I am more *brutish* than any man, and have not the understanding of a man^b." I think, then, that the assertion in my text is thus far made good; and that not only are the lowest of the people in the state described by him, but the highest and most exalted upon earth. In this respect there is no difference between men; for all, without exception, are practically, and by nature, as the beasts that perish.]

But man resembles the beasts also,

II. In his habits—

[See what are the habits of the brute creation! All are intent on that only which will gratify their sensual appetites;

^a Ps. xciv. 7—9.

^b Prov. xxx. 2.

and all look to present gratifications, without any regard to the future. And what is the state of man, of every man, by nature, whether he be old or young, rich or poor, learned or unlearned? Is not every one living for himself, and seeking the things of time and sense, rather than those which are apprehended only by faith, and relate altogether to eternity? I grant that some are prosecuting chiefly intellectual pursuits: but still it is *for themselves*, and *not for God*, that they do it: and if I admit that they soar with the eagle, instead of wallowing in the mire as swine, I still recur to my text, and say, that, whilst living for themselves, and not for God, they are only as the beasts that perish. A man that is taught of God affects higher things than these. He soars far beyond the sun and all created systems, how many or remote soever they may be: he rises to God himself. Contemplating all His glorious perfections, searching into all His eternal purposes, admiring all the wonders of redeeming love, and anticipating the fruition of God himself; this is the constant habit of his mind, and the most eager pursuit of his life, from day to day. "Eye has never seen, nor ear heard, nor heart conceived, the things which fill his soul." None can appreciate the engagements of his soul, till they themselves are born from above, and taught by the Holy Ghost: for "he searcheth the deep things of God," which none but those who are taught of God can know, or conceive, or estimate^c. But to such habits, I say again, the unenlightened man is as great a stranger as the beasts. "He is of the earth earthy," even as the beasts themselves are. And this I say of the wise and learned. What, then, are the generality of men? St. Jude says of them, that, instead of seeking heavenly things, "they speak evil of the things which they know not: but *what they know naturally, as brute beasts*, in those things they corrupt themselves^d." And he knows but little of the world, who does not know, that "this witness is true."]

The same resemblance holds good,

III. In his end—

[This perhaps is the point more immediately referred to in my text. "Men's inward thought," he observes, "is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honour abideth not; he is like the beasts that perish For, when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away with him: this glory shall not descend after him^e." To the same effect Solomon also speaks: "I said in my heart, concerning the estate of the sons of men,

^c 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

^d Jude, ver. 10.

^e ver. 11, 12, 17.

that they, if God manifested it to them, might see that *they themselves are beasts*. For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they all have one breath: so that *a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast*: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of dust, and all turn to dust again^f."

But we must not confine our attention to the mere circumstance of the mortality of each. The Psalmist had in his mind the thoughtlessness of men respecting any thing beyond this life; agreeably to what he says, in another psalm; "*A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this; that when the wicked do spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever*g." Here is their folly, their stupidity, their brutishness: an eternal world is revealed to them; and they will not consider it: heaven and hell are opened to their view; and they will do nothing to avoid the one or obtain the other. Could they indeed die like the beasts, without any future state of retribution, it were happy for them: and such is the state of mankind at large, that there are very few, comparatively, who would not welcome annihilation as a rich and acceptable boon. But to the bar of judgment every soul will be summoned ere long; and "all must receive, at the hands of their Judge, according to what they have done in the body, whether it be good or evil." If in other things, then, they are reduced to a level with the beasts, in this they fall far below them; inasmuch as, with an intellect capable of appreciating eternity, they act as if they had no more interest in it than the beasts themselves.]

SEE, then,

1. What a difference there is between an intelligent Christian and all others!

[I will take the one from the lowest, and the other from the highest, walks in life; and say that the intelligent Christian, however mean, resembles God; whilst the worldling, however elevated, is like the beasts that perish. *In his understanding*, the regenerate man sees things as they really are, and knows that the things which are visible and temporal are not worthy of a thought in comparison of those which are unseen and eternal. *In his habits*, too, he seeks not the things which are on earth, but those which are in heaven, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. And *in his end*, he goes to a world of blessedness and glory, where he shall abide for ever in the bosom of his God. His unenlightened

^f Eccl. iii. 18—20.

^g Ps. xcii. 6, 7.

neighbour accounts all this as folly: but the time is coming, and very shortly too, when it will be made to appear which of the two was really wise — — —]

2. Of what immense importance is the Gospel!

[It is the Gospel only that changes the hearts of men. Doubtless God may use *any* means, or accomplish the conversion of a soul *without* means: but his appointed means are the Gospel, with which, in all ages, he has “turned men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” My dear Brethren, I do hope that some at least of you can bear testimony to the truth of what I say. Once you were as blind as others: but now you see. Once you had no more concern about your souls than others; and lived, like others, for this world only: but now, through the grace of God, you are brought to tread in the steps of Christ and his holy Apostles, and to value nothing in comparison of the favour of your God. And what is it that has made this difference between your present and your former selves? It is the Spirit of Christ that has quickened you, and the love of Christ that yet daily constrains you: and by this change you are assimilated to the glorified saints and angels, yea, and to the image of God himself. Bear testimony, then, to the truth and efficacy of the Gospel; and commend that to others which you have found so effectual for your own souls.]

DLXXXIV.

SPIRITUAL OBEDIENCE PREFERRED BEFORE SACRIFICE.

Ps. l. 7—15. *Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee; I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

IN the psalm before us we have one of those sublime addresses which Jehovah occasionally makes to the whole creation, to hear and judge between him and his offending people^a. The images are taken

^a Isai. i. 2, 3. Mic. vi. 2.

from his appearance on Mount Sinai, which was with terrible majesty, insomuch that “Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake^b.” The scene is “Mount Zion, the perfection of beauty,” even that Zion from whence the Gospel has proceeded, and from whence Jehovah speaks to us as *our* Covenant-God: and this circumstance adds ten-fold weight to his accusations against us. The persons whom he arraigns before his tribunal are of two descriptions; those who rested in mere ceremonial observances for the obtaining of God’s favour; and those who, pretending to higher principles, dishonoured by their conduct their high and holy profession; or in other words, formalists and hypocrites. It is the former of these two characters whom he reproves in our text: and the testimony which he bears against them sets forth in very striking terms,

I. The worthlessness of merely formal religion—

Men are apt to imagine, that by their observance of external duties they lay God under obligation to them—

[God had appointed many rites and ceremonies; and he required the observance of them on the pain of death^c: but he enjoined them for the people’s good, and not for any benefit that could accrue to himself. What pleasure could he take in the blood of bulls and goats? or, if he did, what need had he to be indebted to his people for such offerings, when the whole world was his, and all the cattle on a thousand hills were at his command? It was absurd therefore, and impious, in his people to think that they conferred any obligation upon him by their offerings and oblations.

But the very same error obtains amongst us at this day. If we comply with the external commands of God in an observance of the sabbath, an attendance on ordinances, and a performance of certain duties in the family and the closet, we think that we have a just claim on God, and that he must of necessity feel as much complacency in us, as we do in ourselves. We adduce these services as a clear evidence of the goodness of our hearts, and as an indisputable title to the divine favour — — —]

But external services are of no value in the sight

^b Exod. xix. 16—18. with Heb. xii. 18—21. ^c Numb. xv. 30.

of God, any farther than they are accompanied by vital piety—

[On many occasions God declared his contempt for outward observances, in comparison of spiritual obedience: “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:” “Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice; and to hearken, than the fat of rams.” By the Prophet Isaiah, God replies to those who boasted of “the multitude of their sacrifices;” and tells them, that the whole course of their services, unaccompanied as they were by real piety, were an utter abomination in his sight^d — — — Even whilst bringing his people through the wilderness, he had explicitly declared to them, by Balaam, that it was “not by offering thousands of rams, or rivers of oil, or by giving their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul, that they were to please him, but by doing justly, and loving mercy, and walking humbly with their God^e.” In like manner we are told by our blessed Lord, that it is “to no purpose that we pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, if we neglect the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth^f;” and that to draw nigh to God with our lips, whilst our heart is far from him, is nothing but vile hypocrisy^g. Indeed a moment’s consideration may convince us, that outward services, of whatever kind, cannot be of any value in the sight of God, except as expressions or vehicles of inward piety: for they may be performed without any good principle in the soul; yea, they may proceed from extremely vile and corrupt principles, such as pride, and ostentation, and self-righteousness; and they may most abound, not only where all manner of iniquity is harboured, but as a cloak and cover to that iniquity^h. In a word, “a form of godliness, where the power of it is denied,” is the consummation of all ungodlinessⁱ.]

This is an offensive truth indeed, but it is indispensably necessary to be received—

[How offensive a truth this is, may be seen, by the way in which the hearers of the first martyr, Stephen, resented it, even before it was actually declared, and when they discovered it only as the ultimate scope of his argument. Stephen had given a summary view of God’s dealings with his people from the very beginning: and the scope of his argument was, that as God had a people before the Mosaic dispensation commenced, so he would after its termination; as had been intimated by the Prophet Isaiah, who represents God, as pouring contempt even upon the temple itself, in comparison of a broken and contrite heart. This passage having been cited by Stephen, the whole

^d Isai. i. 11—15.

^e Mic. vi. 6—8.

^f Matt. xxiii. 23.

^g Matt. xv. 8.

^h Matt. xxiii. 14.

ⁱ 2 Tim. iii. 1—5.

audience were filled with indignation, which was visibly manifested in all their countenances, and which gave occasion to that exceedingly abrupt change in Stephen's address to them; "Ye stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye^k." Similar offence is given at this day, when we declare the worthlessness of all external duties as detached from the feelings of the heart. But the very circumstance of God calling heaven and earth to hear his testimony against his people, sufficiently shews, that his accusations, against whomsoever brought, involve in them the deepest criminality, and subject the accused to the heaviest condemnation.]

Contrasted with mere ritual observances, we behold in our text,

II. The religion which alone is pleasing and acceptable to God—

Religion consists not so much in actions, as in the habit of the mind towards God. Holy actions of every kind spring from it; but they are only as the fruit, which originates in, and bears testimony to, the vital energy of the root. Wherever religion exists in the soul, it will have respect to God in all things, and will induce in us *a habit* towards him,

1. Of lively gratitude—

[He is our Creator, our Benefactor, our Redeemer: and the very first motions of religion will lead us to view him under these relations, and with feelings suited to the obligations he has conferred upon us. Can we reflect on the faculties with which he has endowed us, so far superior to all the brute creation, and not adore and magnify his name? Can we contemplate the innumerable benefits with which we are loaded by him from day to day, and not feel how greatly we are indebted to him? Above all, can we survey the wonders of redeeming love, and not have our whole souls penetrated with an overwhelming sense of gratitude? — — — So infinitely does this love surpass all human comprehension or conception, that if our minds were filled with it as they ought to be, we should scarcely be able to think or speak of any thing else — — — Such, we are sure, is the religion of heaven; for there "they rest not day nor night" in ascribing all possible praises to their redeeming God^l: and such, according to the measure of grace given to us, will be the dispositions and habits of all who

^k Compare Isai. lxvi. 1, 2. with Acts vii. 47—51.

^l Rev. iv. 8—11. and v. 11—13.

are truly alive to God — — — “We shall offer him the sacrifice of praise continually^m,” and “render to him the calves of our lipsⁿ.”]

2. Of willing service—

[The Jews were, by the very covenant they had entered into at their circumcision, bound to consider themselves as “a holy people, a kingdom of priests:” and we also, by virtue of our baptismal vows, are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people^o.” The vows then made, it will be our labour, and our delight, to perform. As the holy angels are “doing God’s will, hearkening to the voice of his word,” so we shall be studying to know his will, and be standing ready to execute it to the utmost of our power. It is astonishing what an alteration a principle of religion makes in the soul in this particular! The natural man lives only to himself: the spiritual man lives, or at least endeavours to live, wholly to the Lord; to have no will, no way, no desire, no thought, but what will be pleasing and acceptable in his sight. That which was the first expression of piety in Paul, is the first of every converted soul; “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” A view of him as our Master and our Father will ensure this^p: and in proportion as religion increases in the soul, will be our endeavour to “glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his^q.”]

3. Of humble dependence—

[Religion leads us to realize in our minds the thought of God’s superintending care and effectual agency in our behalf. It does not bring us only to a sense of our obligations to him, but, if we may so speak, to a sense of his obligations to us: for, if “we be his people, he also is our God:” and he, by virtue of his covenant and oath, is as much bound to employ all his glorious perfections for us, as we are to improve all our faculties and powers for him. What a blessed thought is this! In what an exalted view does it place religion, which, if it calls us to duties, invests us also with the most glorious privileges! It teaches us to “call upon him in every time of trouble,” persuaded that “he will hear us,” and give us ever increasing occasion to “glorify his name.” This realizing sense of his presence, this assurance of his effectual interposition in every time of need, is the crown and summit of religion: it most of all glorifies God, and ensures beyond a doubt the richest testimonies of his approbation.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. How to estimate aright our own character—

^m Heb. xiii. 15.

ⁿ Hos. xiv. 2.

^o 1 Pet. ii. 9.

^p Mal. i. 6.

^q Rom. xii. 1. 1 Cor. vi. 20.

[It is not by negative virtues, no, nor by positive virtues of an external kind, that we are to judge of ourselves, but by the disposition of our minds towards God. We may be able to say with the Pharisee, "I am no extortioner, not unjust, no adulterer;" and may be able to add with him, "I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that I possess;" and yet be odious characters in the sight of God. If we would not deceive ourselves, we must inquire into the sense we have of our obligations to him, the determination we feel to approve ourselves faithful to him in the whole extent of our duty, and the confidence with which we are enabled to cast our care on him for body and for soul, for time and for eternity. Without *this*, whatever else we may possess, we are only "as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals:" and "if a man think himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. We must therefore prove our own selves, that so we may have rejoicing in ourselves and not another^r."]]

2. How to secure a favourable testimony from your God—

[Man may easily be deceived: but God will assuredly judge according to truth. He "weigheth," not the actions only, but "the spirits" of men. And when he shall come at the last day, as he certainly will, in majesty and glory infinitely more terrible than that displayed at Sinai, he will testify of us before the assembled universe: and it will be a small matter that he has not to lay to our charge a neglect of outward services, if he have to accuse us of a want of those holy dispositions which we should have entertained and exercised towards him.

We entreat you then, Brethren, to look well to the state and habit of your minds: see to it, that you "delight yourselves in God;" that your whole life be a life of faith in him, of love towards him, and of zeal for the glory of his name: and, whilst you are presenting to him your own bodies and souls as a living sacrifice, present to him that great Sacrifice which was once offered on Mount Calvary for the sins of the whole world, and which alone can avail for your final acceptance with him. Much as he despises the blood of bulls and goats, he will not despise the blood of his only dear Son; but will, for the sake of it, pardon all your sins, and accept, yea and reward too with everlasting happiness and glory, all your imperfect services.]

^r Gal. vi. 3, 4.

DLXXXV.

TRUE PENITENCE DESCRIBED.

Ps. li. 1—3. *Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions! Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me.*

SIN is, for the most part, thought a light and venial evil, especially amongst the higher ranks of society: as though the restraints of religion were designed only for the poor; and the rich had a dispensation granted them to live according to their own will. But sin, by whomsoever committed, will, sooner or later, be as the gall of asps within us; nor can all the charms of royalty silence the convictions of a guilty conscience. View the Psalmist. He had been elevated, from the low condition of a shepherd's boy, to a throne: yet, when he had offended God in the matter of Uriah, there was not found in his whole dominions a more miserable wretch than he. Before his repentance became deep and genuine, "his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long: for day and night God's hand was heavy upon him; and his moisture was turned into the drought of summer^a." Even in his penitence we may see how heavy a load was laid upon his mind. This psalm was written on that occasion: and the words before us, whilst they declare the workings of his mind, will serve to shew us, in a general view, the true penitent:

I. In his occasional approaches to the throne of grace—

"Mercy" is the one object of his desire and pursuit. Observe,

1. His petitions—

[*"Have mercy upon me, O God; blot out my transgressions! wash me thoroughly from mine iniquities; and so cleanse me from my sin,"* that no stain of it may remain upon my soul! Here he views his sins both individually and collectively; and, spreading them before the Lord with conscious guilt, he implores the forgiveness of them: dreading lest so much as one

^a Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. and xxxviii. 2—8.

should be retained in the book of God's remembrance, as a ground of procedure against him in the last day — — — Thus will every true penitent come to God: and plunge, as it were, into the fountain of the Redeemer's blood, "the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness" — — —]

2. His pleas—

[Though David had, till the time of his grievous fall, served God with a more than ordinary degree of zeal and piety, he makes no mention of any *past merits*, nor does he found his hope on any *future purposes*. He relies only on the free and sovereign grace of God, as displayed towards sinners in the gift of his only dear Son: and to that he looks, as the *ground and measure* of the blessings he implores. This is the view which every true penitent must have. He should see that God is of his own nature inclined to mercy^b; and that all which Christ has done for us is the fruit of the Father's love^c. Such are the pleas which God approves; and such will surely prevail in the court of Heaven.]

But, view the penitent farther,

II. In the daily habit of his mind—

Repentance is not a mere occasional expression of the mind, but a state or habit that is fixed and abiding in the soul. The true penitent, wherever he goes, carries with him,

1. A sense of guilt—

["His sin is ever before him:" indeed, he wishes it to be so: he desires to be humbled under a sense of it: and though he longs to have his transgressions blotted out of God's book, he would never have them effaced from his memory; or cease, if he could help it, to have as deep an impression of their odiousness and malignity, as if they had been but recently committed — — — To his latest hour he would "walk softly" before God, in the remembrance of them.]

2. A sense of shame—

[He is ashamed when he reflects on his conduct throughout the whole of his life; yea, "he blushes and is confounded before God^d," and even lothes and abhors himself in dust and ashes^e." Nor does a sense of God's pardoning love produce any difference; except, indeed, as enhancing the lothesomeness of his character in his own eyes^f." The name which, in sincerity of heart, he acknowledges as most appropriate to him, is that which the Apostle Paul assumed, "The chief of sinners."]

^b Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. ^c John iii. 16. Eph. ii. 4, 5. Tit. iii. 4, 5.

^d Ezra ix. 6. ^e Job xlii. 6. ^f Ezek. xxxvi. 31. and xvi. 63.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are not conscious of having committed any flagrant transgression—

[Many, doubtless, are of this character. But have they, on that account, any reason to boast? Who is it that has kept them? “Who is it that has made them to differ?” Will they themselves deny that the *seeds* of all evil are in them? or that, if they had been subjected to the same temptations as others, they might have proved as frail as they? Are they better than David previous to his fall? Let them, then, confess their obligations to God; and remember, that if in *outward act* they have less reason for humiliation than others, they have the same depravity *in their hearts*, and are in reality as destitute of vital piety as others; and, consequently, have the same need of humiliation and contrition as they.]

2. Those who are deeply sensible of their guilt before God—

[What a consolation must it be to you, to see that there was mercy even for such a transgressor as David. Greater enormity than his can scarcely be conceived: yet not even *his* prayers were poured forth in vain. Two things, then, I would say to *you*. The first is, Do not attempt to extenuate your own guilt, as though you would thereby bring yourselves more within the reach of mercy. The other is, Do not presume to limit God’s mercy, as though it could not extend to such a sinner as you. You never need be afraid of beholding your wickedness in all its extent, if only you will bear in mind that God’s mercy in Christ Jesus is fully commensurate with your utmost necessities or desires. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin:” and the more you feel your need of it, the more shall you experience its unbounded efficacy. Only humble yourselves as David did; and, like him, you shall experience all the riches of redeeming grace.]

3. Those who have obtained mercy of the Lord—

[Happy, beyond expression, are ye! as David says; “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sin is covered.” Be joyful, then, in God your Saviour. But still remember, that you have need at all times to watch and pray. If David, after all his high attainments, fell, who is secure? “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” And learn from him to guard against the very first approaches of evil. It was by a look that his corruptions were inflamed: and from the progress of evil in his heart, you may learn to make a covenant with your eyes, yea, and with your hearts too. You see in him “how great a matter a little fire

kindleth." Walk humbly, then, before God; and cry to him day and night, "Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not!"

DLXXXVI.

SIN AN OFFENCE AGAINST GOD.

Ps. li. 4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.*

THE occasion of this psalm is well known: it refers to one of the most melancholy transactions that ever took place in the world. In point of enormity, the deed is almost without a parallel; because it was performed by a man who till that time had made the highest professions of religion, and had been characterized even by God himself as "the man after God's own heart^a." But it is not the crime which David committed, but only the repentance which followed it, that is the subject of our present consideration. For a long time his heart was hardened: but after that Nathan had come from God to accuse and condemn him, he yielded to the conviction, and humbled himself before God in dust and ashes. In this psalm is recorded the prayer which David offered unto God on that occasion: and it was given by David to the Church, that it might be a pattern, and an encouragement, to penitents in all future ages. The particular declaration in our text is introduced as an aggravation of his guilt. We are not however to interpret it so strictly, as if the crime which David had committed were really *no* offence against man; for in that view it was as heinous as can possibly be conceived: it was a sin against Bathsheba, whom he had defiled: against Uriah, whom he had murdered; against Joab, whom he had made an instrument to effect the murder; against all the soldiers, who were murdered at the same time; against the friends and relatives of all

^a If this were the subject of a *Magdalen Sermon*, it would be proper in a delicate manner to enlarge somewhat on the crime itself.

who were slain; against his own army, who were hereby weakened and discouraged; against the whole nation, whose interests were hereby endangered; against the Church of God, who were hereby scandalized; and the ungodly world, who were hereby hardened in their iniquities. It was “a sin also against his whole body^b.” We must therefore understand the expression rather as comparative; as if it had been said, “Against thee, thee *chiefly*, have I sinned.” Nevertheless, as an offence against God, the enormity of the crime is so great, as almost to swallow up and annihilate every other consideration of it, as the meridian sun reduces to non-existence, as it were, the twinkling of a star. It is from *this* consideration of it that *every* sin derives its chief enormity. Dropping therefore any further reference to David’s crime, we shall endeavour to shew in general,

I. The malignity of sin as an offence against God—

Men in general think little of sin, except as it affects the welfare of society: as an offence against God, it is scarcely ever deemed worthy of notice. But every sin, of whatever kind, necessarily strikes at God himself: it implies,

1. A forgetfulness of his presence—

[He is omnipresent; nor is any thing hid from his all-seeing eye — — — But, when we commit sin, we lose all recollection that God’s eye is upon us: we say in our hearts, “The Lord shall not see; neither shall the God of Jacob regard it^c.” “How shall God know? Is there knowledge with the Most High^d?” “Thick clouds are a covering to him, that he cannot see^e.” This is no deduction of ours, but the declaration of God himself: and the truth of it is evident: for, if even the presence of a fellow-creature is sufficient to overawe men, so that they cannot perpetrate crimes to which they are most strongly tempted; so much more would the presence of Almighty God restrain us, if we were conscious that he was inspecting and witnessing all the secrets of our hearts.]

2. A contempt of his authority—

[God, as the great Lawgiver, requires obedience to his laws, every one of which bears the impress of divine authority

^b 1 Cor. vi. 18.

^d Ps. lxxiii. 11.

^c Ps. xciv. 7.

^e Job xxii. 13, 14.

upon it. But in violating his commands, we trample on his authority, and say in effect, "I am at my own disposal: who is Lord over me^f?" "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord; neither will I obey his voice^g:" "I will not have this man to reign over me^h." We have a striking exemplification of this in the conduct of the Jews, who, contrary to God's command, would go down into Egypt: "As for the word that thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, (said they to Jeremiah,) we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouthⁱ." Thus, as God himself says, "We not only forget him, but cast him behind our back^k."]

3. A disbelief of his truth—

[God has spoken frequently respecting his determination to punish sin: he has said, that "he will by no means clear the guilty;" and that, "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not pass unpunished." Now, if we truly believed his word, we could not rush into sin: the apprehension of such tremendous consequences would deter us from it. But we are hardened by unbelief. Unbelief was the source of all the Israelites' rebellions in the wilderness^l; and it is the fruitful spring of all our disobedience: "Ye shall not surely die," is at the root of every evil we commit^m. But "God is not a man, that he should lie, or the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it goodⁿ?" Let us bear this in mind, that in the commission of sin, and the expectation of impunity, we "make God himself a liar^o."]

4. A denial of his justice—

[God has represented himself as "a God of judgment, by whom actions are weighed^p;" and has declared his purpose to "call every work into judgment," and to "judge every man according to his works." But, in violating his laws, "we say, in fact, God will not require it^q:" "The Lord is altogether such an one as ourselves^r;" "he will not do good, neither will he do evil^s." What an indignity is this to offer to the Governor of the Universe, the Judge of quick and dead! He has spoken of the last day as "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God:" but, if the issue of it were such as we expect, and heaven were awarded to wilful and impenitent transgressors, it would rather be a day wherein God's

^f Ps. xii. 4.

^g Exod. v. 2.

^h Luke xix. 14.

ⁱ Jer. xlv. 16, 17. ^k Ezek. xxiii. 35.

^l Ps. cvi. 24. Heb. iii. 19.

^m Gen. iii. 4.

ⁿ Numb. xxiii. 19. ^o 1 John v. 10.

^p 1 Sam. ii. 3.

^q Ps. x. 13.

^r Ps. l. 21.

^s Zeph. i. 12.

want of justice and of holiness shall be displayed before the whole assembled universe.]

5. A defiance of his power—

[Men who commit iniquity are represented as “stretching out their hands against God, and strengthening themselves against the Almighty; yea, as running upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his buckler^t:” and to what a fearful extent this is done, we may see by the testimony of God himself: “They, the workers of iniquity, say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it^u.” Does this appear an exaggerated account of men’s impiety? See then how they are described by the Psalmist: “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His ways are always grievous; thy judgments are far above, out of his sight: as for all his enemies, he *puffeth at them*^x.” What an astonishing height of impiety is this; to *puff at* God’s threatenings, as if we defied him to his face! Yet do we see that this is the very conduct of men, whenever we warn them to flee from the wrath to come: we seem to menace them with judgments which they have no cause to fear, and to set in array against them an enemy whom they are at liberty to despise.]

When once we view sin as an offence against God, we shall be prepared to acknowledge,

II. The equity of his judgments which he has denounced against it—

That God has denounced the heaviest judgments against it, is certain—

[*Against sin in general* he has denounced eternal misery: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God^y” — — — *Against every individual that commits it*, he has also denounced his judgments: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die^z” — — — *Against every particular sin*, whatever be men’s excuses for retaining it, the same awful sentence is proclaimed^a — — — Death, everlasting death, is the wages due to sin^b, and the wages that shall be paid to every sinner at the last day^c — — —]

In executing these he will be completely justified—

[We are ready to account such denunciations of wrath severe, and to question the equity of them — — — But the

^t Job xv. 25, 26.

^u Isai. v. 19.

^x Ps. x. 4, 5.

^y Ps. ix. 17. Rom. i. 18.

^z Ezek. xviii. 20. 1 Pet. i. 17.

^a Mark ix. 42—48.

^b Rom. vi. 23.

^c Matt. xxv. 46.

penal evil of damnation will not appear in the least to exceed the *moral evil* of sin, if we duly consider against whom sin is committed.

Consider *his greatness*. "Great is the Lord," says the Psalmist, "yea, his greatness is unsearchable." If we could conceive the meanest reptile, or the smallest insect, endued with such a measure of intelligence as to be able in some degree to appreciate the dignity of a mighty monarch; and then to exalt itself against him, and to pour all manner of contempt upon him; the atrocity of such presumption would justly excite our keenest indignation. But the whole universe together is not as the smallest insect in comparison of God; and yet we, we atom insects of an atom world, dare to set ourselves against his divine majesty, yea, to defy him to his face. Will God then be unjust if he execute his judgments on such impious worms? Are we at liberty to insult him; and is he not at liberty to avenge himself on us? — — —]

But consider also *his goodness*. O how unbounded has this been! How has he borne with us in all our rebellion! How has he sent his only-begotten Son, to expiate our sin, and to open a way for our reconciliation with him! How has he sought to glorify in our salvation those very perfections, which we have so impiously despised, and which he might well glorify in our everlasting condemnation! How has he sent his Holy Spirit, to instruct, renew, and comfort us! How has he sent his word and ministers, to invite, entreat, expostulate, yea, and, as it were, to "compel us" to accept of mercy! This he has done from our youth up: this he is doing yet daily and hourly: and, as if all his own happiness were bound up in ours, he says, "How shall I give thee up?" "Wilt thou not be made clean? Oh! when shall it once be?" This is the God against whom we are sinning. This is the God whom we wish extinct^d; and respecting whom we say, "Make the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us." This is he, "whose blessed Son we trample under foot, and to whose eternal Spirit we do despite^e:" yea, that very "goodness and long-suffering and forbearance which should lead us to repentance," are made by us an occasion of multiplying our offences against him. Say now whether he will "be unrighteous in taking vengeance?" Were a fellow-creature to make such returns to us, and to render nothing but evil to us for all the good we did him, should we think that he had any claim on us? Should we account ourselves unjust, if we did not acknowledge him as one of our dearest friends, and place him on a footing with our own beloved children, and make him an heir of all that we possessed? Should we not feel ourselves amply justified in rejecting such an absurd and

^d Ps. xiv. 1. Omitting the words in Italics.

^e Heb. x. 29.

groundless claim as this? Know then, that *we* have no claim on God; and, when he shall exclude us from the inheritance of his saints, “he will be justified” in the judgment that he shall denounce against us. Indeed, in assigning us this portion, he will only give effect to our own wishes, and answer us in the desire of our own hearts: we said to him, “Depart from *us*; we desire not the knowledge of thee^f,” and he will say to us, “Depart from *me*; depart accursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels^g.”]

The whole creation will unite in vindicating these judgments as just and good—

[Doubtless, if it were possible, sinners would urge at the bar of judgment the objections which here they presume to bring against the justice of their God. But sin will then appear in all its deformity: it will then be seen what a God we sinned against, and what mercies we despised. Even in this world, when once persons are brought to view themselves aright, they justify God in all that he sees fit to inflict upon them^h. Aaronⁱ, Eli^k, Hezekiah^l, David^m, all confessed, that God had a right to deal with them in the way that he had done. Much more in the day of judgment, when every thing will be seen in its true light, will the whole universe approve the sentence which God shall pass on the world of the ungodly: they will make the very punishment of the wicked a subject of their songs; “saying, Allelujah! salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgmentsⁿ.” Indeed the miserable objects themselves, though they cannot join in the song, will be unable to condemn the sentence. The man who was excluded from the marriage-feast for not having on a wedding garment, might have urged, that he was brought in before he had time to procure one: but his plea would have been false and unavailing; and therefore “he was speechless^o,” a striking monument of conscious guilt, and an awful specimen of a condemned soul^p.]

In this acknowledgment then of David we may SEE,

1. The grand constituents of repentance—

[Many may be sorry that they have subjected themselves to punishment, just as a criminal may that he has forfeited his life to the laws of his country: but no man can truly repent, till he sees, that his whole life has been one continued state of

^f Job xxi. 14.

^g Matt. xxv. 41.

^h It is worthy of observation, that God’s goodness to David is mentioned as the greatest aggravation of his offence. 2 Sam. xii. 7—9.

ⁱ Lev. x. 3.

^k 1 Sam. iii. 18.

^l Isai. xxxix. 8.

^m Ps. xxxix. 9.

ⁿ Rev. xv. 3. and xix. 1, 2.

^o Matt. xxii. 12.

^p Rom. iii. 19.

rebellion against God; and that “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” is his just desert. Till a man has that view of himself, he will never be thoroughly broken and contrite; he will never lothe and abhor himself for his iniquities; he will never have that “repentance which is unto life, that repentance which is not to be repented of.” We entreat you all then to judge of your repentance by these marks. Do not be satisfied with being humbled on account of sin; but inquire particularly, whether you are more humbled from a view of it as against *man*, or a view of it as against *God*. These ought to bear no proportion in your estimate of your own character. Your own nothingness and vileness can only be estimated aright when viewed in contrast with the majesty you have offended, and the mercy you have despised: and till you see that everlasting misery in hell is your deserved portion, you can never lie so low as you ought to lie.]

2. The true preparative for pardon—

[Something we *must* bring with us to the Saviour: but what is that which we ought to bring? Must we get a certain portion of good works wherewith to purchase his salvation? No: this is a price which he will utterly despise. That which we are to bring is precisely what a patient brings to a physician, a sense of his extreme need of the physician’s aid. Christ came to save sinners: we then must feel ourselves sinners. He came to seek and save that which was lost: we then must feel ourselves lost. A just sense of our guilt and misery is all that he requires: if we come wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, he will give us that gold that has been tried in the fire, the raiment that shall cover our nakedness, and the eye-salve that shall restore our eyes to sight. If we come to him full, we shall be sent empty away: but if we come hungry and empty, we shall “be filled out of his inexhaustible fulness,” we shall “be filled with all the fulness of our God.”]

3. The best preservative from sin—

[When Joseph was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, he answered her, “How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Thus we would recommend all, when tempted to commit iniquity, to consider, first, what God will think of it; and next, what they themselves will think of it in the last day? *Now* it may appear light and venial, especially if it be not such a heinous sin as adultery or murder: but when it comes to be seen in its true light, as against an infinitely good and gracious God; and when the judgments which he has denounced against it come to be felt; what shall we think of it

^a Gen. xxxix. 9.

then? Oh! ask yourselves, ‘What will be my view of this matter in the last day?’ Then even the sins that now seem of no account, will appear most heinous, and the price paid for a momentary indulgence, most prodigal. The selling of a birth-right for a mess of pottage is but a very faint emblem of the folly of those, who for the whole world are induced to barter the salvation of their souls. View things in any measure now, as you will view them at the last day; and you will rather die a thousand deaths than sin against your God.]

DLXXXVII.

ORIGINAL SIN.

Ps. li. 5. *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

ONE of the most essential marks of real penitence is, a disposition to see our sins as God sees them: not extenuating their guilt by vain and frivolous excuses, but marking every circumstance that tends to aggravate their enormity. During their impenitence, our first parents cast the blame of their transgression upon others; the man on his wife; and the woman on the serpent that had beguiled her: but, when true repentance was given them, they no doubt beheld their conduct in a very different view, and took to themselves all the shame which it so justly merited. The sin of David in the matter of Uriah was great, beyond all the powers of language to express. Yet there were points of view in which none but a real penitent would notice it, and in which its enormity was aggravated a hundred-fold. This is the light in which the Royal Penitent speaks of it, in the psalm before us. Having spoken of it as an offence, not merely against man, but primarily, and almost solely, against Jehovah himself, he proceeds to notice it, not as an insulated act or course of action, but as the proper fruit of his inherent, his natural, corruption. We are not to suppose, that he intended by this to cast any reflection on his mother, of whom he elsewhere speaks in most respectful terms; nor are we to imagine, that he adduces the nature which he had derived from her, as an excuse

for the wickedness he had committed : his intention is, to humble himself before God and man as a creature altogether corrupt, and to represent his wickedness as no other than a sample of that iniquity of which his heart was full, a stream issuing from an overflowing fountain. This, we doubt not, is the genuine import of the words which we have now proposed to consider ; “ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin hath my mother conceived me.”

In prosecuting this important subject, we shall endeavour to establish,

I. The truth asserted—

The doctrine of Original Sin is here distinctly affirmed. It is indeed by many denied, under the idea that it would be inconsistent with the goodness and mercy of God to send into the world immortal beings in any other state than one of perfect purity. But it is in vain for us to teach God what he *ought* to do : the question for us to consider is, What hath God done ? and what account has he himself given us of our state ? And here, if the Scriptures be true, there is no room for doubt : we are the corrupt offspring of degenerate parents ; from whom we derive a polluted nature, which alone, since their fall, they could possibly transmit. This we shall proceed to prove,

1. From concurring testimonies—

[*Moses*, in his account of the first man that was born into the world, expressly notices, that Adam begat him not in the likeness of God, in which he himself had been originally created, but “ in *his own* likeness,” as a fallen and corrupt creature^a: and how different the one from the other, may be conjectured from the conduct of this first-born, who imbrued his hands in his brother’s blood. In his account too, as well of the post-diluvian, as of the ante-diluvian world, he tells us, that “ every imagination of the thoughts of man’s heart was only evil continually^b.” *Job*, not only affirms the same awful truth, but shews us that it is impossible in the nature of things to be otherwise : since from a thing that is radically and essentially unclean, nothing but what is unclean can proceed^c. The

^a Gen. v. 3.

^b Gen. vi. 5. and viii. 21.

^c Job xiv. 4. and xv. 14—16. and xxv. 4.

testimony of *Isaiah* and *Jeremiah* is altogether to the same effect^d; as is that also of Solomon in the book of *Ecclesiastes*^e. And, in the New Testament, our Lord himself teaches us to regard the heart as the proper womb, where every species of iniquity is generated, and from whence it proceeds^f: and *St. Paul* declares of himself, as well as all the rest of the human race, that they “are *by nature* children of wrath^g.” But how can we be in such a state *by nature*, if we are not corrupt? Can God regard as objects of his wrath creatures that possess his perfect image? No: it is as fallen in Adam that he views us, and as inheriting a depraved nature that he abhors us^h.]

2. From collateral evidence—

[Whence was it that God appointed *the* painful and bloody *rite of circumcision* to be administered to infants of eight days old, but to shew that they brought into the world with them a corrupt nature, which it was the bounden duty of all who were in covenant with him to mortify and subdue? Whilst, on the one hand, it sealed to them the blessings of the covenant, it intimated to them, on the other hand, that they needed to have “their hearts circumcised, to love the Lord their God.”

Again, how comes it that *every child*, from the first moment that he begins to act at all, *manifests corrupt tempers and dispositions*? If only some, and those the children of wicked men, evinced such depravity, we might be led to account for it in some other way: but when, with the exception of one or two who were sanctified from the womb, this has been the state of every child that has been born into the world, we are constrained to acknowledge, that our very nature is corrupt, and that, as David tells us, “we are estranged from the womb, and go astray as soon as we are bornⁱ.”

Further, How can we account for *the sufferings and death of infants*, but on the supposition, that they are partakers of Adam’s guilt and corruption? Sufferings and death are the penalty of sin: and we cannot conceive that God would inflict that penalty on millions of infants, if they were not in some way or other obnoxious to his wrath. *St. Paul* notices this, as an irrefragable proof that all Adam’s posterity fell in him, and through him are partakers of guilt and misery^k.

Once more; Whence is it that *all need a Saviour*? If children are not, in the eye of God, transgressors of his law, they cannot need to be redeemed from its curse. But Christ is as much the Saviour of infants as of adults. We find no

^d Isai. vi. 5. Jer. xvii. 9.

^e Chap. ix. 3.

^f Mark vii. 21.

^g Eph. ii. 3.

^h The subject does not lead us to notice Adam as *a federal head*; and therefore we confine ourselves to what lies immediately before us

ⁱ Ps. lviii. 3.

^k Rom. v. 12, 14.

intimation in the Scriptures that any are saved without him: on the contrary, it is said, that, "as in Adam *all* died, so in Christ shall *all* be made alive." In the temple shown to Ezekiel, there was one door for the prince: it was the door by which the Lord God had entered: and was to be for ever closed to all except the prince¹. So Christ alone enters into heaven by his own merits: to all besides him that door is closed: and Christ alone is the door by which *we* must enter in; he is the only way to the Father: nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any child of man come unto the Father but by him^m.

These things then, especially, as taken in connexion with the many express declarations before quoted, are decisive proofs, that David's account of himself was true, and that it is equally true of all the human race.]

This truth being established, we proceed to mark,

II. The importance of adverting to it in estimating our state before God—

Unless we bear in mind the total corruption of our nature, we can never estimate aright,

1. Our individual actions—

[Even in common courts of judicature, the great object of inquiry is, not so much *the act* that has been done, as *the mind* of the agent: and, according as that appears to have been depraved or blameless, the sentence of condemnation or acquittal is passed upon him. Precisely thus must we judge ourselves in our conduct towards God. To elucidate this part of our subject, we will suppose two persons to have been guilty of the same *act* of treason towards an earthly sovereign, but to have differed widely from each other in respect of *the mind* with which they acted: one entered upon it *unwittingly*, and without any consciousness that he was doing wrong: the other *knowingly*, and aware that he was rebelling against his lawful sovereign. One did it *reluctantly*, through the influence of one whom he could not easily withstand; but the other *willingly*, as a volunteer in the service, and as following the impulse of his own mind. One went *without premeditation*, being taken hastily and off his guard: the other *with a fixed purpose*, after much plotting and deliberation. In one it was a *solitary act*, altogether contrary to the whole of his former life: in the other it was *frequent*, as often as the temptation arose, or the occasion offered. The one proceeded *with moderation*, not having his heart at all engaged in it: the other *with a fiery zeal*, abhorring in his soul the authority he opposed. The one had *his mind open to conviction*, and might easily be prevailed upon

¹ Ezek. xliv. 2, 3.

^m John x. 9. and xiv. 6.

to renounce his error: the other was *filled with self-approbation and self-applause*, thinking nothing of his risks and dangers, if he might but help forward the utter subversion of the government. Take these two persons, and say, whether, notwithstanding their acts were in appearance the same, there would not be an immense difference between the measure of their criminality in the estimation of an upright judge? There can be no doubt on this subject. Take then any other sin whatever, (for all sin is treason against the King of kings;) and examine how far it has been voluntary, deliberate, habitual; how far it has been against light and knowledge; and how far it has proceeded from a heart radically averse to God and holiness. Let sins of omission be examined in this way, as well as sins of commission: and then the things which now are accounted light and venial, will appear hateful in the extreme, not merely as blighted "grapes of a degenerate vine," but as "grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrha:" their enormity will be felt, in proportion to the strength and fixedness of the principle from which they spring.]

2. Our general character—

[If our actions have not been openly sinful, we are ready to bless ourselves as having but little ground for shame and remorse. But if we consider "the enmity of the carnal mind against God," and view our utter want of all holy affections, and exceeding proneness to some besetting sins, we shall see but little reason to glory over the vilest of mankind. We shall see abundant cause indeed for thankfulness to God, who by his preventing grace has restrained us from many evils into which others have run: but we shall take no credit to ourselves as better than others. If we behold bitter fruit produced by others, we shall remember that there is the root of it all in ourselves: if we see in others the streams of wickedness, we shall bear in mind, that the fountain of it all is in ourselves also. Thus, however free we may be from any flagrant enormity, we shall be ready to acknowledge with Paul, that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" and with Job to say, "Behold, I am vile! I repent, and abhor myself in dust and ashes." So far from indulging self-preference and self-esteem, we shall find no names more suited to us than those by which St. Paul designated his own character, "Less than the least of all saints," and "The very chief of sinnersⁿ."]

From this view of our natural corruption, we may
LEARN,

1. How greatly we need the renewing influence of God's Spirit—

ⁿ Eph. iii. 8. 1 Tim. i. 15.

[Outward amendment might suffice for outward sins: but where the heart itself is so corrupt, we must have “a new heart given to us,” and “be renewed in the spirit of our minds.” With such hearts as ours, it would be impossible for us to enter into the kingdom of heaven, or to enjoy it even if we were there: we could not bear the sight of so holy a God; nor endure to spend our lives in such holy employments. — — — Know then, that “old things must pass away; and all things must become new.” “That which is born of the flesh, is flesh:” the stream can rise no higher than the fountain head. If ye would enjoy the things of the Spirit, ye must be “born of the Spirit,” who alone can impart the faculties necessary for that end. Let your prayer then be like that of David, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!”]

2. How carefully we should watch against temptation—

[If we carried about with us a load of powder which a single spark would cause to explode, we should be extremely careful to avoid whatever might subject us to danger. Should we not then, with hearts so corrupt, and with temptations so thick around us, look well to our ways, and pray unto our God to keep us from the evils of an ensnaring world? Well did our blessed Lord say, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation:” “The spirit may be willing, but the flesh is weak.” Who that reflects on David’s state previous to his fall, does not fear for himself, and cry mightily unto God, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe!” “Uphold me with thy free Spirit, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me!” To all then we say, “Be not high-minded, but fear:” “Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.”]

° ver. 10.

DLXXXVIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INWARD INTEGRITY.

Ps. li. 6. *Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

MANKIND at large are chiefly observant of their outward conduct; but the child of God cannot rest in externals: he is anxious about the internal habits of his soul; and desires to have them conformed to the mind and will of God. The words before us strongly express this idea. By many indeed they are interpreted, as if David intended in them to

aggravate yet further the guilt he had contracted, which had been in direct opposition both to the profession he had made, and to the light he had enjoyed^a. But we conceive that the words, as they stand in our translation, convey the true meaning of the Psalmist; and that they relate, not to *his sins*, but *his repentance for them*. The sense of them appears to be to this effect; "Thou requirest me to be truly sincere in my present humiliation; and, if I am, as I desire to be, thoroughly sincere, thou wilt make this whole dispensation a source of the most important instruction to my soul." In this view of the words, they are an humble address to God, declarative of,

I. The disposition He requires—

"Truth," is a conformity of our feelings and actions to our professions: and *this* God requires of us in the whole of our spirit and conduct. He requires it,

1. In our acknowledgments—

[We confess ourselves sinners before God. But such a confession is of no value in his sight, unless it be accompanied with suitable emotions. Think then, what becomes us, as sinners: what deep sorrow and contrition should we feel for having offended Almighty God! what self-loathing and self-abhorrence for our extreme vileness and baseness! what ardent desires after mercy! what readiness to justify God in all that he may be pleased to inflict upon us in this world, whatever means or instruments he may see fit to use; yea, and in the eternal world also, even if he cast us into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and make us everlasting monuments of his wrathful indignation! *This* should be the state and habit of our minds: we should have "our hands on our mouths, and our mouths in the dust," "crying, Unclean, unclean!" In a word, we should adopt from our inmost souls the language of Job, "Behold, I am vile! therefore I repent and abhor myself in dust and ashes." In proportion as we feel thus, we are upright, and have "truth in our inward parts:" but so far as we are wanting in these feelings, we are hypocrites in heart," drawing nigh to God with our lips in a way belied by our hearts^b."

2. In our purposes—

^a In this case, the last clause is read in the past tense; "Thou *hast made* me to know."

^b Matt. xv. 7, 8.

[We profess, as persons redeemed by the blood of our incarnate God, to give up ourselves to him, and to live unto Him who died for us: and, if we are sincere in this, our determination is fixed, that, with God's help, nothing shall ever keep us from executing this intention. We have deliberately counted the cost. We are aware, that "if we will live godly in Christ Jesus, we must suffer persecution:" but we are prepared to meet it, from whatever quarter it may come, yea, though "our greatest foes should be those of our own household." We are ready to sacrifice our reputation, our interests, and our very lives also, rather than in any respect deny our God, or suffer ourselves to be diverted from the path of duty. We are determined, through grace, to put away every thing that may retard our progress heavenward, and to aspire after the highest possible attainments in righteousness and true holiness. Now God requires, that we should be acting up to this profession, "setting our face as a flint against the whole world," and standing in the posture of Daniel or the Hebrew Youths, willing to have our bodies consigned to a den of lions, or a fiery furnace, rather than violate our duty by any sinful compliance. If we are halting or hesitating, we have not truth in our inward parts.]

3. In our endeavours—

[Purposes must be judged of by the exertions that are put forth in order to carry them into effect. A diligent attendance therefore on all the means of grace must of necessity be required of us: in the public ordinances, and in our private chambers, whether we be hearing, or reading, or meditating, or praying, we must be like men in earnest, even like the manslayer fleeing from the pursuer of blood, that scarcely stopped to look behind him, till he should reach the appointed sanctuary, the city of refuge. Remissness in such a cause argues a want of real integrity: if truth be indeed in our inward parts, we shall *run* as in a race, which leaves us no time to loiter; and *wrestle* with all our might, lest we be foiled in the contest; and *fight* as those who know that there is no alternative but to overcome or perish. In all the interior workings of our minds we shall resemble the Corinthians, who were "clear in this matter^c."]

That we may not be discouraged by the strictness of God's requirements, let us consider,

II. The benefit he will confer—

There is a wisdom that is to be gained only by experience: what has its seat in the head, may be learned by the head: what dwells in the heart, must

^c 2 Cor. vii. 11.

be learned by the heart: and of the heart there is but one teacher, even God; according as it is said, "Who teacheth like God^d:" and again, "There is a spirit in man; and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding^e."

Amongst the treasures of wisdom which God will impart to the truly upright, and the hidden things which he will cause them to know, are,

1. The deceits of the heart—

[These are very deep, and absolutely unsearchable^f; yet in a measure will God discover them to those who have truth in their inward parts. The world at large know nothing of them: "they are calling evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness; and bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter^g:" "they feed also on ashes: a *deceived heart* hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, or say, Is there not a lie in my right hand^h?" They contrive to satisfy their minds that all is well with them, or at least to lull their consciences asleep with the hope that all will be well with them before they die. They have a thousand pleas and excuses which they urge in their own defence, and which they vainly hope will be accepted by their Judge. If we attempt to open their eyes, they reply, with indignation, "Are we blind alsoⁱ?" Thus are they both blinded and "hardened" through the deceitfulness of sin. But those who are really "Israelites indeed, and without guile," have their eyes opened to see what delusions they have cherished: and being thus "brought out of darkness into marvellous light," they find that promise fulfilled to them, "They that erred in spirit shall come to understanding^k." "Their eye being made single, their whole body is full of light."]

2. The devices of Satan—

[The men of this world, though "taken in his snares, and led captive by him at his will," have no idea of his agency. But he is a subtle adversary; and his "wiles" are innumerable. He can even "transform himself into an angel of light^l;" and, when aiming a deadly blow at our souls, assume the garb of "a minister of righteousness." His first device is, to persuade men that they are in no danger of the judgments they fear. If he fail in that, he will instil into their minds the notion that they have gone too far, and that there is no hope for them.

^d Job xxxvi. 22.

^e Job xxxii. 8.

^f Jer. xvii. 9.

^g Isai. v. 20.

^h Isai. xlv. 20.

ⁱ John ix. 40.

^k Isai. xxix. 24.

^l 2 Cor. xi. 13, 14.

If that snare do not succeed, he will draw them aside, after some points of less importance, or “matters of doubtful disputation.” Multitudes of false apostles has he at his command, who will gladly aid him in this accursed work^m, and concur with him in his endeavours to “corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christⁿ.” But, if we are following the Lord fully, he will not leave us “ignorant of Satan’s devices, or suffer him to get his wished-for advantage over us^o.” He will arm us against that adversary, and enable us to withstand him^p. He will give us “the shield of faith, whereby we shall ward off and quench all his fiery darts^q,” and be able so to “resist him, that he shall flee from us^r.”]

3. The mysteries of grace—

[“Great is the mystery of godliness,” and great the mystery of grace, whether we consider the work *wrought for* us by Jesus Christ, or the work *wrought in* us by his Holy Spirit. These constitute that “wisdom, which is foolishness with man,” and which “the natural man cannot receive, because it is spiritually discerned^s.” To know this, we must be taught of God: “We must receive, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, before we can know the things that are freely given to us of God^t.” And O! how wonderful a work does this appear, when “God shines into our hearts to reveal it to us!” How worthy of God! how suitable to man! how passing the comprehension, whether of men or angels! Verily, the man whose eyes are thus opened, seems to be brought into a new world: “old things are passed away, and all things are become new.” The ignorant world are amazed at the new line of conduct he pursues, just as Elisha’s servant was at his master’s confidence in the midst of danger. But, if their eyes were opened to see, as the Believer does, the invisible God^x above him and within him, they would wonder rather, that there were any bounds to his transports, or any limit to his exertions.]

4. The beauties of holiness—

[All who are warped by their prejudices, or blinded by their lusts, are incapable of estimating aright the beauty and blessedness of true piety: it appears to them little short of madness. And even those who make a profession of godliness, but possess not truth in their inward parts, have very erroneous conceptions of true holiness. Some place it in a confident espousal of certain principles, or a zealous attachment to a particular party: others, inclining more to practical religion, make all duty to centre in

^m 2 Cor. xi. 13.

ⁿ 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^o 2 Cor. ii. 11.

^p Eph. vi. 11.

^q Eph. vi. 16.

^r Jam. iv. 7.

^s 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 9, 14.

^t 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12.

^u 2 Cor. iv. 6.

^x 2 Kings vi. 15—17. Heb. xi. 27.

some one point, such as the mortification of the flesh, or almsgiving, or penances of man's invention. Even those who are more enlightened, are apt to regard only one particular *set of graces* that are more congenial with their own feelings, and to neglect those which are of an opposite aspect; one despising every thing in comparison of zeal and confidence; another leaning altogether to the side of prudence and timidity. But the man into whose hidden part God has put true wisdom, views holiness, not with prismatic partiality, separating one grace from another, but all embodied, as light in the sun; every grace tempering its opposite, and all combining to the production of perfect beauty. He discards neither the vivid nor the darker ray: but, having all in united exercise, sorrow with joy, and fear with confidence, "the beauty of the Lord his God is upon him^y," and he shines in the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness^z.]

From this subject we may LEARN,

1. Whence it is that men get so little insight into the Gospel—

[Many hear the Gospel during their whole lives, and never attain any just knowledge of it. How shall we account for this? We suppose the Gospel to be preached with all possible fidelity, and yet it seems never to convey any light to their minds. The reason is, that they never take any pains to apply it to their own souls, or to get any one truth realized in their own experience. They assent to every thing they hear; but they are content with being hearers, without ever once attempting to become doers of the word they hear. They "see perhaps their face, as in a glass, for the moment; but they go away, and forget what manner of men they are^a." But our blessed Lord has told us, that we must aim at doing his will, in order to get any just insight into what he has revealed^b: and, as this desire is altogether wanting in the persons we are speaking of, they never derive any solid benefit from the Gospel. O Brethren! you must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own souls." You must apply the word to your own hearts: when you hear your sins pointed out, you must endeavour to humble yourselves for them in dust and ashes: when you hear of Christ as the one only Saviour of a ruined world, you must endeavour to flee to him for refuge: when the Holy Ghost is set forth as the one great source of all spiritual life and motion, you must cry to God the Father for his dear Son's sake to send the Holy Spirit into your hearts, that the whole work of grace may be wrought within you. It is your neglect of thus harrowing in

^y Ps. xc. 17.

^a Jam. i. 22—25.

^z 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^b John vii. 17.

the seed by meditation, and of watering it with tears, that has given Satan an opportunity of taking it out of your hearts as soon as ever it has been sown there^c. Get the "honest and the good heart," which truly desires to make a just improvement of the word, and God will yet cause the seed to spring up in your hearts, and to bring forth fruit to the salvation of your souls.]

2. Whence it is that many who profess the Gospel are so little ornaments to it—

[It is a melancholy fact, that many who profess godliness walk very unworthy of their high calling. Like Ezekiel's hearers, they are gratified with the preaching of the Gospel, as persons are with "one who plays well upon an instrument; but their heart still goeth after their covetousness^d," or some other besetting sin. But this is owing to their not having "truth in their inward parts:" if they had, they would not be satisfied with professing the Gospel, and talking about it, and looking with pity (or perhaps with contempt) on those who do not understand it: no; they would look to their spirit, that it should be meek and humble; they would look to their conduct also, that it should be blameless and without guile: they would "give no occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully." Ah, Brethren! think what God requires of all, and of those who make a profession of religion more especially: and beg of God to endue your souls with truth and wisdom, "that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ." You may fancy that you "know all the depths of Satan^e:" but if your professed "hope in Christ does not purify your souls as Christ is pure^f," you are yet blinded by him, and utterly deceiving your own souls^g.]

3. How to get the whole work of God perfected in our souls—

[Come to the Gospel with hearts tender and contrite, that they may be to it as wax to the seal. Then shall you have in your own souls "the witness" of all its most important truths^h: and shall be able to answer from your own experience that question which God puts so triumphantly to all the world; "Doth not my word do good to him that walketh uprightly?" You are not straitened in God: be not straitened in your own souls. Desire much: ask much: expect much: and God will supply your every want "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."]

^c Matt. xiii. 4, 19.

^e Rev. ii. 24.

^g Jam. i. 26.

^d Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.

^f 1 John iii. 3.

^h 1 John v. 10.

DLXXXIX.

THE MEANS OF DELIVERANCE FROM SPIRITUAL LEPROSY.

Ps. li. 7. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*

EVERY part of God's word is profitable for our instruction in righteousness; but, in the Psalms, religion is exemplified, and, as it were, embodied. The workings of genuine repentance are admirably delineated in that before us. David traces his iniquities to their proper source, his original corruption. He acknowledges the necessity of a thorough renovation of soul: and, in legal terms, but of evangelical import, he implores forgiveness.

The expressions in the text intimate to us,

I. The nature of sin—

The generality of the world imagine sin to be a light and venial evil. Some indeed have learned to dread it *as destructive* of their eternal happiness; but very few have any idea of it *as defiling and debasing* the soul.

It is in this view, however, that we are now called to consider it—

[Sin has defiled every member of our body, and every faculty of our soul: hence St. Paul speaks of it as “filthiness both of the flesh and spirit^a.” What uncircumcised ears^b, what venomous tongues^c, what adulterous eyes^d, have the greater part of mankind^e! How are all their members used as instruments of unrighteousness^f! What pride, and envy, what wrath, and malice, are harboured in the bosom! How gladly would we cast off all allegiance to God, and be a god unto ourselves^g! Thus, in *fleshly* lusts, we degrade ourselves almost to a level with the beasts^h; and, in *spiritual* filthiness, we too much resemble the fallen angelsⁱ. How different is this state from that in which we were first created^k! Yet is the change effected solely by the agency of sin^l.]

In this view, more especially, is sin represented in the text—

^a 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^b Acts vii. 51.

^c Jam. iii. 6.

^d 2 Pet. ii. 14.

^e See Rom. iii. 10—19.

^f Rom. vi. 13.

^g Ps. xii. 4.

^h 2 Pet. ii. 22.

ⁱ John viii. 44.

^k Gen. i. 27.

^l Rom. v. 12.

[The Psalmist evidently refers to the state of a leper, or a leprous house. No disorder was more lothesome than leprosy^m. A person infected with it was driven from the society of his dearest relatives, and was necessitated to proclaim his uncleanness to all who approached himⁿ. Nor could his disorder ever be cured by the art of man. If he were ever healed, it was by God alone, without the intervention of human means. Hence David, knowing the filthiness and incurableness of sin, cries to God.]

Similar representations also abound in every part of the sacred writings—

[Our *natural* depravity is declared in expressions of the like import^o. Our *acquired* corruptions are said to render us lothesome objects^p. The very *remains of sin* in the holiest of men are also described in similar terms^q: yea, the most eminent saints, in bewailing their sinfulness, have used the very same figure as David in the text^r. Happy would it be for us, if we had these views of sin: we should soon put away our proud, self-exalting thoughts, and should adopt the confessions of holy Job^s.]

But, vile as sin is, it may be both forgiven and subdued—

II. The means of deliverance from it—

It has been already observed, that David alludes to the case of a leper. This is manifest from the terms, wherein he implores deliverance. Under Jewish figures he sets forth the only means of salvation—

[Certain means were prescribed by God for the purification of a leper^t. *When God had healed him*, “the priest was to take two clean birds, with cedar-wood, scarlet, and hyssop.” Having killed one of the birds, the priest was to “dip the hyssop and the live bird in the blood of the bird that had been slain:” he was then to “sprinkle the leper seven times, and to let loose the living bird.” This ordinance typified the death of Christ, with his resurrection, and subsequent *ascension into heaven with his own blood*^u. A similar ordinance is explained by the Apostle in this very manner^x, and the same effect is

^m Lev. xiii. 8.

ⁿ Lev. xiii. 44—46.

^o Job xv. 14—16.

^p Prov. xiii. 5.

^q Rom. vii. 24. The allusion seems to be to a dead body, which was sometimes fastened to criminals, till they died in consequence of the stench arising from it. In such a light did St. Paul view the remains of sin which he felt within him.

^r Isai. vi. 5.

^s Job ix. 20, 21, 30, 31.

^t Lev. xiv. 2—7.

^u Heb. ix. 12.

^x Heb. ix. 13, 14.

plainly ascribed to the things here typified^y." It is therefore in reference to Christ that David says, "Purge me with hyssop."

In the purification of a *leprous house*, water was used with the blood^z. This further typified the renewing influences of the Spirit of Christ, and David seems to allude to it, when he adds, "Wash me," &c. Nor is this by any means a forced or fanciful distinction. An inspired writer lays peculiar stress upon it^a, and every enlightened person sees as much need of Christ's Spirit to wash him from the defilement of sin, as of his blood to purge him from its guilt.]

The efficacy ascribed to these means is not at all exaggerated—

[There is no sin whatever which the blood of Christ cannot cleanse. We cannot conceive more enormous transgressions than those of David, yet even *he* could say with confidence, "Purge me, &c. and I shall be clean." Purified in this way, his soul would become "whiter than snow." This blessed truth is attested by the beloved Apostle^b, and it is urged by God himself as an inducement to repentance^c. Our renewal indeed by the Holy Spirit is not perfect in this life, but it shall be continually progressive towards perfection^d, and, when the leprous tabernacle shall be taken down, it shall be reared anew in consummate purity and beauty^e.]

INFER—

1. How mistaken are they, who seek salvation by any righteousness of their own!

[We can no more eradicate sin from our souls, than a leprosy from our bodies. No man ever more deeply bewailed his sin, or more thoroughly turned from it than David^f, yet he did not say, "Purge me with *my tears, my repentances*, or *my duties*, but, purge me *with hyssop*, and I shall be clean:" he would make mention of no righteousness but that of Christ^g; nor would St. Paul himself trust for a moment in any other^h. Shall we then boast as if we were more penitent than David, more zealous than Paul? Let us rather humble ourselves in the language of Jobⁱ, and determine to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ^k.]

2. What encouragement is here afforded to mourning penitents!

^y Rom. iv. 25.

^z Lev. xiv. 48—53.

^a 1 John v. 6.

^b 1 John i. 7.

^c Isai. i. 18.

^d 2 Cor. iv. 16.

^e 2 Cor. v. 1. Phil. iii. 21.

^f Ps. vi. 6. and xxxviii. 4—6.

^g Ps. lxxi. 15, 16. ^h Phil. iii. 9.

ⁱ Job ix. 15. and xl. 4.

^k Gal. vi. 14.

[If David did not despair of mercy, who else can have cause to do so? If the blood of Christ could so purge *him*, why may it not *us* also? If it had such efficacy a thousand years before it was shed, surely it will not be less efficacious now it has been poured forth. But it is not the mere shedding of Christ's blood that will profit us. We must, by faith, apply it to our own souls. Let us then go to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh such good things to us¹: let us cry with earnest and repeated entreaties, "Purge *me*, wash *me*!" thus shall our polluted souls be whiter than snow itself, and ere long we shall join in that general chorus^m.]

¹ Heb. xii. 24.^m Rev. i. 5, 6.

DXC.

THE OPERATIONS OF SIN AND OF GRACE.

Ps. li. 8. *Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.*

NEXT to the obtaining of pardon, a penitent will desire the manifestation of that pardon to his soul. A state of suspense on such a subject as the forgiveness of sins, is too painful to be endured without earnest prayer to God for the removal of it. We wonder not, therefore, that the Psalmist, after imploring mercy at the hands of God through the blood of the great Sacrifice, should seek a restoration of peace and joy: for, in truth, a soul that has once tasted peace with God, and known the joy of his salvation, can never be satisfied, till it basks in the beams of divine love, and has the light of God's countenance lifted up upon it.

The terms in which the Psalmist implores this blessing, will lead me to shew,

I. The power of sin to wound the soul—

We may all have some idea of the anguish arising from broken bones. But that is small, in comparison of that which is brought upon the soul by sin. "The spirit of a man will sustain any bodily infirmity: but a wounded spirit, who can bear?" Deep indeed are the wounds inflicted by sin, in the case of,

1. An unconverted sinner—

[Hear the desponding complaint of Cain: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." He felt himself an outcast from God and man; and was haunted by a guilty conscience, which was ever tormenting him with its accusations, and causing him to anticipate, with terrible apprehensions, his final doom. The state of Judas was not less appalling than his. The traitor had promised himself much pleasure from the wages of his iniquity: but no sooner had he betrayed his Lord, than he was filled with remorse, and constrained to confess his guilt, and could no longer retain the money with which he had been bribed, yea, could no longer endure his very existence, but went and hanged himself.

Previous to the commission, sin appears but a light and venial evil: and, even after it has been committed, often leaves the mind in a state of extreme insensibility and obduracy. But let it once be brought home to the conscience by the operation of the Spirit of God, and it will inflict a wound there, which will be a foretaste of hell itself, even "a certain looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation that shall consume" the soul for ever.]

2. A blacksliding saint—

[The example of Peter may teach us the bitter effects of sin on a mind susceptible of its enormity. What pangs did he feel, when his Divine Master looked upon him, and fixed conviction on his soul! No longer able to contain himself, "he went out and wept bitterly." But let us fix our attention more particularly on David, whose words we are considering. Under a sense of his enormous guilt, "his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day long: for God's hand was heavy upon him, so that his moisture was turned to the drought of summer^a." Hear his cries under the agonies he endured: "O Lord, rebuke me not in thy wrath, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure: for thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over my head; as an heavy burthen they are too heavy for me. I am troubled: I am bowed down greatly: I go mourning all the day long. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart^b." In another psalm he still further complains, "My soul is full of troubles; and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves^c." Who that hears these bitter wailings must not acknowledge

^a Ps. xxxii. 3, 4. ^b Ps. xxxviii. 1—8. ^c Ps. lxxxviii. 3, 6, 7.

that sin is a tremendous evil, and that, however it may be "rolled under the tongue for a season as a sweet morsel," "it will bite at last like a serpent, and sting like an adder?"]

Let us, not, however, be so intent on the power of sin to wound the soul, as to forget,

II. The power of grace to heal it—

What were the sins which had broken David's bones? Adultery and murder. And was it possible that they should be forgiven, and that the person who had committed them should ever "hear again of joy and gladness?" Yes: there is nothing too hard for God's power to effect; nothing too great for his mercy to bestow.

The provision made for sinners in the Gospel is adequate to the necessities of all—

[This is a blessed truth, and full of the richest consolation. If there were any bounds to the mercy of God, or to the merits of his dear Son, millions of the human race must sit down in utter despair. But, when we learn that Christ is "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world," and that "his blood cleanseth from *all* sin;" when we are informed also, that persons who are accepted in the Beloved, stand before God "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, and are holy and without blemish;" none can say, "There is no hope for me." On the contrary, even David himself is authorised to say, "Purge *me* with hyssop, and *I* shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be *whiter than snow*."]

The man who lays hold on the Gospel shall have all his sorrows turned into joy—

[Of this, David himself was an eminent example. Even *he* could say, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness^d." Who can tell the full efficacy of "the balm of Gilead?" Who can fully declare what peace and joy are imparted to the sinner, when God lifts upon him the light of his reconciled countenance? Verily, the peace that is then imparted to his soul "passeth all understanding;" and "the joy" that flows in upon him "is unspeakable and glorified." Behold the converts on the day of Pentecost, or the jailer, when once the Saviour was revealed to him: how speedily were all their sorrows dissipated, and their griefs turned into the sublimest joy! And cannot many amongst ourselves attest

^d Ps. xxx. 11.

that God is still the same, and that his grace is as effectual as ever for the reviving and the comforting of the contrite soul^e? Be it known to all, that “God will not contend for ever; neither will he be always wroth; lest the spirit should fail before him, and the souls which he has made^f.”]

We may LEARN from hence,

1. What folly it is to “make a mock at sin”—

[Yes truly; they are justly called fools” who do so: for whilst sin robs us of our innocence, it can create a very hell upon earth. And who is he, against whom it may not prevail? Look at David, the man after God’s own heart; see from what an eminence he fell, and into what an abyss of guilt and misery! Does not his example speak loudly to us all? Does it not say to every one of us, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall?” Beware, then, of sin: beware of the very first motions of sin in the soul. “Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!” And let all of us “flee from sin, as from the face of a serpent;” and cry daily unto God to “hold us up in his arms, that our footsteps slip not.”]

2. What a mercy it is that the Gospel is sounding in our ears—

[Where can the weary and heavy-laden soul find rest, but in Christ Jesus? What hope could David ever have entertained, if he had not looked to the great sacrifice to purge away his sin? The Law did not so much as prescribe any offering for such sins as his: and if he had not looked forward to the Gospel, he must have died without hope. But his broken bones were healed by a sight of Christ; and so shall ours be, if we “flee for refuge to Him, as to the hope that is set before us.” To all, then, I will say, Improve your privileges: and if your bones be broken with a sense of sin, the prophet’s counsel is given you this day by my mouth: “Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up^g.”]

^e Isai. lvii. 15.

^f Isai. lvii. 16.

^g Hos. vi. 1.

DXCI.

TRUE RENOVATION OF HEART.

Ps. li. 10. *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*

PARDON and peace are the first blessings which a penitent will seek. But no true penitent will be satisfied with them: he will desire with no less ardour

the renovation of his soul in righteousness and true holiness — — — The psalm before us gives a just epitome of the penitent's mind. David begins with fervent supplications for pardon: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions!" He comes afterwards to implore a sense of God's forgiving love: "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." He then desires a restoration of his soul to the divine image: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

In these words we may see,

I. The great constituents of true piety—

A mere reformation of life, however exemplary, will be no better than the painting of a sepulchre, which is "full of rottenness and all uncleanness." If we would be approved of our God, we must have,

1. A clean heart—

[“The heart of fallen man is full of evil^a,” and from it, as from its proper source, all manner of evil proceeds^b. God himself has testified respecting it, that “all its thoughts and imaginations are evil^c.” Hence there is an indispensable necessity, that it should be renewed by grace: for, if left in an unrenewed state, it could not enjoy heaven, even if it were admitted there. Being altogether corrupt, it could not delight itself in the presence of a holy God, or find satisfaction in those exercises of praise in which the glorified saints and angels are incessantly engaged. To find happiness in God and holy exercises, it must acquire a totally different taste; or rather, it must be wholly changed: it must be cleansed from all its corrupt propensities: it must be made averse from sin: and all its powers must be sanctified unto the Lord.]

2. A right spirit—

[By a “*right*” spirit is meant a “*constant*” spirit. A man, even after he is once cleansed, is yet prone to sin. He is beset with temptations both from without and within: and he needs to “be strengthened with might in his inner man,” in order that he may be able to withstand them. It will be in vain that he has been once “cleansed from the pollutions of the world: if he be ever again entangled with them and overcome,

^a Eccl. ix. 3.

^b Mark vii. 21—23.

^c Gen. vi. 5.

“ His last end will be worse than the beginning^d. ” He must “ be steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord^e, ” if ever he would find acceptance at the last. “ He must endure unto the end, if ever he would be saved. ”]

Seeing that these things are so necessary, let us inquire,

II. How they are to be obtained—

They are not the work of man, but of God alone. They are God's work,

1. In their commencement—

[The giving of a clean heart is justly called “ a new creation : ” “ *Create in me a clean heart, O God.* ” Hence he that is in Christ is called “ a new creature^f. ” When we survey the heavenly bodies, we see and know that they cannot have been the work of any created being: the impress of Divinity is stamped upon them. And not less certain is it that a new heart must be the gift of God. True it is, that God has said, “ Make you a new heart, and a right spirit: for why will ye die^g? ” But it is also true, that God has promised to give it to us: “ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh^h. ” Here all is the gift of God: and it is to be obtained from God in the exercise of prayer and faith. It is *our duty* to have a clean heart: and therefore God says, “ *Make you one.* ” But, since we cannot do it of ourselves, we are to *turn the command into a petition*: “ *Create it in me, O God!* ” And, to shew us that such petitions shall not be in vain, *God makes our petition the subject of an express promise*: “ *A new heart will I give you.* ” This points out the true way of obtaining all spiritual blessings: we must be sensible that it is our duty to possess them: but, from a consciousness of our inability to obtain them by any efforts of our own, we must cry to God for them, and plead with him the promises which he has given us in the Son of his love. “ Laying hold on these promises, ” we shall obtain the strength which we stand in need of; and shall be enabled to “ cleanse ourselves from all filthiness, both of flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of Godⁱ. ”]

2. In their progress—

[Stability of mind is as much the gift of God as regeneration itself: it is He alone that can “ make us perfect; establish,

^d 2 Pet. ii. 20.

^e 1 Cor. xv. 58.

^f 2 Cor. v. 17.

^g Ezek. xviii. 31.

^h Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

ⁱ 2 Cor. vii. 1.

strengthen, settle us^k." We need only look to David for an illustration of this truth. What man ever lived, on whom you might depend more fully than on him? He was "a man after God's own heart;" disciplined in the school of adversity, and honoured with divine communications to as great an extent as the most favoured of the sons of men. Yet behold, how he fell! Look at Solomon too. Who, that had seen him at the dedication of the temple, would have ever supposed that he should betray such weakness and folly as he did, during the greater part of his reign? Alas! "what is man," if left to himself; if left only for a single instant? If God be not with him to uphold him, he will become the sport of every temptation, "driven to and fro with every wind," whether of sentiment or of feeling^l. He must be assisted in every part of his duty, whether of "putting off the old man, or putting on the new." The same Almighty power which raised Christ from the dead must work mightily in him^m, to "renew him in the spirit of his mind," till the whole work of God be perfected within him: and to the latest hour of his life his prayer must be, "May the very God of peace, who brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, make me perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in me that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Christ Jesus^o!"]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who feel no need of such a change as is described in our text—

[By the generality, such a change is deemed no better than a wild enthusiastic conceit: and if a man have been baptized into the faith of Christ, and been enabled to maintain an honourable and consistent walk through life, he is conceived to be in a state of perfect safety. But had not Nicodemus been admitted into covenant with God in the way prescribed by God himself, and in the only way in which any were or could be admitted under the Mosaic dispensation? and was he not a person of most exemplary character? Yet to him did our Lord say again and again, "*Ye must be born again*;" and if a man be not born again, "*he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven*." To get rid of this awful admonition, many will identify regeneration with the act of baptism, under an idea that the inward grace must of necessity accompany the outward sign. But if this be the case in one sacrament, it must be equally so in the other: whereas we are told, that a man may partake of the Lord's supper unworthily; and, instead of being saved by it, may only

^k 1 Pet. v. 10.

^l Eph. iv. 14.

^m Eph. i. 19, 20.

ⁿ Eph. iv. 23, 24.

^o Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

^p John iii. 3, 5, 7.

"eat and drink his own damnation^a." And so may a man render baptism the means of his more aggravated condemnation; as Simon Magus actually did: for he continued as much "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity" after his baptism, as he was before, with the additional guilt of his hypocrisy in having applied for baptism in a state altogether unworthy to receive it^r. Beloved Brethren, whatever men may say, you must be born again of the Spirit, as well as of water: you must become "new creatures in Christ Jesus:" and if God create not in you a clean heart, and renew not in you a right spirit, Satan himself may hope for heaven as well as you: for, if there be any truth in the word of God, "without holiness," real, inward, universal holiness, no man shall see the Lord^s."

2. Those who profess to have experienced it—

[There are two things against which I would particularly take occasion to guard you: the one is presumption; the other is despondency.

You have probably heard persons speak of divine grace being an imperishable seed; which, once bestowed, must of necessity bring a man to glory. But it is the word of God which is the only imperishable seed^t: nor is there in the universe a man who is authorised to say, 'I cannot fall.' To enter into this subject at large, is beyond my present purpose. The man who cannot see his frailty in the character of David, and his inability to restore himself in the long impenitence of David, will probably be left to learn these things by bitter experience. But to every man among you "that has an ear to hear," I would say, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall^u." And if I were speaking even to a prophet of the Most High, and he as eminent as David himself, I would whisper in his ear this salutary caution, "Be not high-minded, but fear^v."

Yet, if there be here one who has fallen into sin, I would say, Despair not, as though there were not mercy enough in the bosom of your God to pardon you, or power enough in his arm to keep you. Yea, if, like David, you had committed the aggravated crimes of adultery and murder, I would still point you to the great Sacrifice, even to the Lord Jesus Christ; and would put into your mouth that prayer of David, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow^w." I would, however, remind such an one, that it will not be enough for him to obtain pardon and peace: he must have "a clean heart created in him,

^a 1 Cor. xi. 29.

^r Acts viii. 21—23.

^s Heb. xii. 14.

^t 1 Pet. i. 23.

^u 1 Cor. x. 12.

^x Rom. xi. 20.

^v ver. 7.

and a right and constant spirit renewed within him," if ever he would "see the face of God in peace." Yet I would add, that there is nothing impossible with God; and that he who magnified his mercy in the salvation of an adulterous and murderous David, will "cast out none who come to him" in humility and faith, as David did.]

DXCII.

THE PENITENT ENCOURAGED.

Ps. li. 14. *Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation! and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.*

THIS psalm is full of encouragement to a real penitent; but in particular the petition before us. Consider the crime committed—murder; the most atrocious murder that ever was committed. Consider by whom it had been committed—the man after God's own heart, who had experienced from God more signal interpositions than almost any other man that ever breathed. Consider the long and inconceivable obduracy which he had indulged since the commission of it, even to the very hour when his guilt was charged upon him by the Prophet of the Lord. Could such a sin as this be forgiven? Could such an offender dare to ask forgiveness, or entertain the remotest hope of obtaining it? Surely, if David could approach his God under such circumstances as these, with the smallest hope of acceptance, then may we see in this passage,

I. The privilege of a contrite soul—

There is not a sinner in the universe who may not go to God, as "a God of salvation"—

[Were there only a hope that mercy might be a constituent of the divine character, and an attribute which might by some possibility be displayed, it were a sufficient encouragement to the vilest sinner upon earth to call upon his God. But the title here assigned to the Most High, opens to us a most wonderful view of his character. He is "a God of salvation;" as having devised a way of salvation for a ruined world; as having given us his only dear Son to effect it; as having accepted the sacrifice of his Son in our behalf; and, as applying that salvation to those whom "he has chosen in Christ

Jesus before the world began." He is "a God of salvation," as making the redemption of the world his great concern; yea, as altogether occupied in it; so as, if I may so speak, to be swallowed up in it, and to be "a God of it." We read of him as "a God of patience and consolation," yea, "a God of all grace:" but the title given in my text meets most fully the necessities of mankind, and opens a door of hope to every sinner under heaven.]

Nor is there a sin which, if truly repented of, shall not be forgiven—

[We read, indeed, of the sin against the Holy Ghost, as excepted from the tremendous catalogue of pardonable sins. But it is not excepted because of its enormity, as though it were too great to be forgiven; but only because *that sin* implies a wilful and deliberate rejection of the only means of salvation: it destroys, not because it exceeds the efficacy of the Redeemer's blood, but because it tramples on that blood which alone can expiate even the smallest sin. A man who determinately rejects all food, needs not to do any thing else to ensure his own destruction: he rejects the necessary means of life, and therefore must inevitably perish. But we may say without exception, that "the blood of Jesus Christ both can and will cleanse from all sin," if only we sprinkle it upon our conscience, and trust in it for salvation. It is worthy of observation, that the Psalmist expresses no doubt as to the possibility of his acceptance with God. He does not say, "If such guilt *can* be forgiven, deliver thou me;" but simply, "Deliver me." Nay, in a preceding part of this psalm he says, "Purge me with hyssop, and I *shall* be clean; wash me, and I *shall* be whiter than snow^a." Whatever guilt, therefore, may lie upon the conscience of the vilest sinner under heaven, let him go to God, and cry with humble confidence, "Deliver me, O God of my salvation!"]

From this example of David, we may further learn,
II. The duty of all who have obtained mercy of the Lord—

The world are ready to complain, "Why do you not keep your religion to yourself? But no pardoned sinner ought to do so: he is bound to render thanks for the mercies vouchsafed unto him.

1. He owes it to God—

[Surely God is to be honoured, as a God of providence and a God of grace. Are we distinguished above the brute

^a ver. 7.

creation? We should bless God for the faculties bestowed upon us. Are we elevated above any of our fellows by the communication of spiritual blessings to our souls? We are bound to praise God for such "an unspeakable gift." If we forbore to speak His praises, methinks "the very stones would cry out against us."]

2. He owes it to the world—

[How are the world to be instructed in the knowledge of God, if those to whom that knowledge is imparted are silent respecting him? We owe a debt to them. "What our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life," we are bound to declare to them. We are not at liberty to put our light under a bushel; but must "make it to shine before men, that they also may glorify our Father who is in heaven." "When we are converted," we are bound in every possible way to "strengthen our brethren."]

3. He owes it to himself—

[Suppose a man to "have been forgiven much, will he not love much?" and will not love vent itself in the praise of the object beloved? Especially if a man have been made a partaker of God's righteousness, will he not sing aloud of that righteousness? No doubt he will: and, if the angelic hosts would account it a painful sacrifice if silence were imposed upon them, and they were forbidden to shew forth the praises of their God, so would it be with the believing soul, in proportion to the measure of grace that had been conferred upon him.]

To all, then, I SAY,

1. Be particular in your applications to God for mercy—

[Do not rest in mere general confessions or general petitions; but search out the hidden iniquities of your hearts, and spread them distinctly before God in prayer. We have not all committed the sins of David: but are we not all sinners? And if we would search the records of our conscience, might we not find some evils which call for more than ordinary humiliation? Or, if *in acts* we have been free from any remarkable transgression, have we not felt such *motions* of sin within us, as might, if God had given us up to temptation, have issued in the foulest transgressions? We need only recollect what our Lord tells us, that an impure and angry thought is constructive adultery and murder; and we shall see little reason to cast a stone at others, and abundant reason for humiliation before God. I say, then, search out, every one of you, your besetting sins, and implore of God the forgiveness of them.]

2. Have respect to God under his proper character—

[View God not merely as your Creator, your Governor, and your Judge, but as your Covenant God and Saviour. See how David addresses him: “O God, thou God of *my* salvation!” Thus it will be well for every sinner of mankind to do. See *your own* interest in him: see what provision he has made for *you*; what invitations he has given to *you*; what promises he has held forth to *you*. THIS will encourage penitence: *this* will strike the rock for penitential sorrows to flow out. In a word, view God as he is in Christ Jesus, a God reconciling the world unto himself; and you will never indulge despair, nor ever doubt but He will shew mercy to all who call upon him in spirit and in truth.]

3. Determine, through grace, to improve for God the blessings you receive—

[It was a suitable determination of David, that, if his requests should be granted, “his tongue should sing aloud of God’s righteousness.” A similar resolution becomes us. Are we interested in a salvation which displays “the righteousness of God,” and makes every perfection of his to concur in the promotion of our welfare? Let us not be silent: let us not be ashamed to confess him before men: though the whole world should endeavour to silence us, let us not regard them for one instant: but let us say with David, “I will praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel: My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long^b.”]

^b Ps. lxxi. 22—24.

DXCIII.

A BROKEN HEART THE BEST SACRIFICE.

Ps. li. 16, 17. *Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.*

“WHEREWITHAL shall I come before the Lord?” is the first inquiry that will be made by an awakened sinner. No sooner were the murderers of our Lord “pricked to the heart” with a conviction of their guilt, than they cried out, (the whole assembly of them together), “Men and brethren, what

shall we do?" In answer to this, man proposes many costly offerings; and for the obtaining of peace would present unto God any thing that he should require^a. Had God required sacrifices to be offered for David's sins, he would gladly have offered them, however numerous or costly they had been: "Thou desirest not sacrifice: else would I give it thee." But there is only one thing required, and *that* universally, of all people under heaven: and what that is, we are informed in the words before us: "The sacrifices of God," &c.

Here are two points to be inquired into;

I. What is that sacrifice which God approves—

The term "sacrifice" is metaphorically applied to many things: to praise and thanksgivings^b; to alms-deeds^c; to a surrender of the soul to God^d. But in our text it does not so much refer to any offerings whereby a pardoned sinner may honour God, as to that disposition of mind whereby an unpardoned sinner may facilitate his acceptance with God. As to any external services, David informs us that these would not answer the desired end: for though many offerings under the law were appointed and approved of God as typical of the great sacrifice, yet were they in themselves of no value^e, especially when compared with obedience^f; and, when substituted for obedience, they were hateful and abominable in the sight of God^g. For such sins as David's there was actually no sacrifice appointed: no penalty less than death could be awarded to the person that was found guilty either of adultery or murder^h. But there is a sacrifice which will forward the acceptance even of such an atrocious sinner as David: it is called in our text, "A broken and contrite heart." To ascertain what is meant by this, let us consider,

1. The term—

^a Mic. vi. 6, 7. ^b Heb. xiii. 15. ^c Heb. xiii. 16.

^d Rom. xii. 1. ^e Ps. l. 8—14. ^f 1 Sam. xv. 22. Hos. vi. 6.

^g Isai. i. 11—15. and lxvi. 3. and Amos v. 21—23.

^h Numb. xxxv. 31 Deut. xxii. 22.

[We all have some idea of what is meant by “a broken heart,” when applied to worldly sorrow. It signifies a person overwhelmed with sorrow to such a degree, that he is always bowed down under its weight, and incapable of receiving consolation from any thing but the actual removal of his burthens. *Thus far* it may serve to illustrate the meaning of our text, and to shew what is meant by a heart broken with a sense of sin — — — But in other respects there is an exceeding great difference between the two: for a heart broken with worldly troubles, argues an ignorance of our own demerit—a want of resignation to God—a want of affiance in him—and a low esteem of those benefits which sanctified affliction is calculated to produce — — — In these respects therefore it forms a contrast, rather than a resemblance, to true contrition.

Let us then drop the *term*, and consider the *thing*.]

2. The thing—

[“A broken and a contrite heart” consists in a deep sense of our guilt and misery—a self-loathing and abhorrence on account of the peculiar aggravations of our sin, (as committed against a gracious God and a merciful Redeemer,)—a readiness to justify God in his dealings with us, whatever they be,—and such an insatiable desire after mercy, as swallows up every other sensation, whether of joy or sorrow — — —

View all these things distinctly and separately—compare them with the workings of David’s mind as set forth in this psalmⁱ — — — view them as illustrated by other portions of Holy Writ^k — — — and the more they are considered, the more will they discover to us the precise nature of that sacrifice which is described in the text.]

Let us now proceed to inquire,

II. Why God honours it with his peculiar favour—

That God does signally honour it, is certain—

[When it is said that “a broken and contrite heart God will not *despise*,” more is meant than is expressed: it means, that God will honour it with tokens of his peculiar approbation. Whoever he be that offers to him this sacrifice, God will *notice him*, even though there were only one in the universe, and he the meanest and vilest of mankind. Not all the angels in heaven should so occupy his attention as to prevent him from searching out that person, and keeping his eye continually

ⁱ ver. 3, 4, 7—9.

^k 2 Chron. xxxiv. 27. Job xl. 4. and xlii. 6. with Zech. xii. 10. Luke xv. 18, 19. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13. or all together. 2 Cor. vii. 11. or as exemplified in other of David’s Psalms, Ps. xxxviii. 4—10. and xl. 12. Perhaps it will be best to confine the illustrations to Ps. li. and xxxviii. for fear of swelling this part of the subject too much.

fixed upon him for good¹ — — — Moreover, God will *comfort him*; he will not merely view him from heaven, but will come down and dwell in his heart on purpose to comfort and revive him^m — — — Nor is this all; for God will surely and eternally *save him*ⁿ: and the more abased the man is in his own eyes, the higher will God exalt him on a throne of glory^o — — —]

And the reasons of his so honouring it are plain—

[*It is the work of his own Spirit on the soul of man.* No created power can effect it: we may break and bruise the body, but we can never produce in any one a broken and contrite spirit. This is God's prerogative^p; and whoever has obtained this blessing must say, "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing, is God^q."—Again, *It is the precise disposition that becomes us.* If the holy angels that never sinned veil their faces and their feet in the presence of their God, what prostration of mind must become such guilty creatures as we are! Surely we must "put our hands on our mouth, and our mouth in the dust, crying, Unclean, unclean!" yea rather, we should "gird us with sackcloth, and wallow ourselves in ashes, and make mourning as for an only son, even most bitter lamentation^s."—Further, *It disposes us to acquiesce cordially in God's appointed method of recovery.* Till we are thoroughly broken-hearted with a sense of sin, we never estimate aright the unspeakable blessings of Redemption. We may profess a regard for the Gospel; but we do not really "glory in the cross of Christ;" Christ does not truly become "all our salvation and all our desire." But to the truly contrite, O how precious is the name of Jesus, that adorable name, the foundation of all our hopes, the source of all our joys!—Lastly, *It invariably stimulates us to a cheerful unreserved obedience.* No commandment is hard to a person, when once his heart is truly broken and contrite. Let us see that we were dead, and that Christ died for us; and a sense of "his love will constrain us to live to him," and to "glorify him with our body and our spirit, which are his."

Say now, whether here be not reason sufficient for the distinguished favours which God vouchsafes to the contrite soul? We know that there is nothing *meritorious* in contrition: but there is in it a suitableness for the reception of the divine mercies, and for the reflecting back upon God the honour which he confers upon it.]

This subject may well be IMPROVED,

¹ Isai. lxvi. 2.

ⁿ Ps. xxxiv. 18. Job xxxiii. 27, 28.

^p Job xl. 11. Ezek. xi. 19.

^r Lam. iii. 29. with Lev. xiii. 45.

^s Jer. vi. 26. with Jam. iv. 9, 10.

^m Isai. lvii. 15.

^o Luke xviii. 14.

^q 2 Cor. v. 5.

1. For the conviction of the impenitent—

[Worldly sorrow has more or less been the portion of us all: but how few have “sorrowed after a godly sort!” The generality have never laid to heart their sins at all: and they who have felt some compunction, have for the most part been satisfied with a little transient sorrow, and something of an outward reformation of life. But let this be remembered, that when it is said, “God will *not* despise the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart,” it is manifestly implied, that he *will* despise every thing short of that. Do not then deceive yourselves with an expectation that God will accept your feigned or partial humiliation: your penitence must be deep, and your change radical: your sorrow for sin must far exceed any worldly sorrow, and must bring you incessantly to the foot of the cross, as your only refuge and your only hope: nor will any repentance short of this be “a repentance unto salvation, but only a repentance eternally to be repented of.”]

2. For consolation to the penitent—

[When once you become truly penitent, *men* will begin to despise you: they will look upon you as a poor weak enthusiast, and will “cast out your name as evil” — — But your comfort is, that *God* will not despise you. If the Psalmist had merely *affirmed* this, it would have been a rich ground of consolation: but he makes it a matter of *appeal* to God; “A broken and contrite spirit, *thou, O God*, will not despise.” What a glorious truth! When you are so vile and contemptible in your own eyes that you blush and are confounded before God, and “dare not even lift up your eyes unto heaven,” God looks upon you with pleasure and complacency, and acknowledges you as his dearly beloved child^u. Do you want evidence of this? See for whom God sent his only-begotten Son into the world^x; and read the account given of the *very first sermon that Jesus ever preached*^y: and hear to whom in particular he addressed his invitations^z: consider these, I say, and then reject the consolation if you can.]

3. For instruction to the more advanced Christian—

[Is a broken and contrite heart the sacrifice with which you must come to God? Know that it is that which you must continue also to offer him to the latest hour of your lives. You are not to lose the remembrance of your shame and sorrow, but to “lothe yourselves *after* that God is pacified towards you^a,” yea, and *because* that God is pacified towards you. The more abundant is his mercy towards you, the more should you *athor* yourself for having ever sinned against so gracious a God. You

^t 2 Cor. vii. 10.

^u Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

^x Isai. lxi. 1—3

^y Luke iv. 17—21.

^z Matt. xi. 28.

^a Ezek. xvi. 63.

cannot but have seen in others, and probably felt within yourselves a disposition to depart from this ground, and to indulge a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride. I entreat you to examine yourselves with respect to it — — — It is a common evil, and is very apt to lurk in us unperceived. But if we see it not ourselves, we shall without fail discover it to others; or, if they should not discover it, God will behold it, and that too with utter abhorrence^b. Watch over yourselves therefore, and pray that you may grow continually in lowliness of mind, in tenderness of conscience, in meekness of temper, and in purity of heart. The more you resemble little children, the higher will you be in the kingdom of God^c.]

^b Prov. xvi. 5. and 1 Pet. v. 5.

^c Matt. xviii. 4.

DXCIV.

THE AFFLICTED SOUL COMFORTED.

Ps. lv. 6. *And I said, O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.*

TROUBLE is the portion of all, without exception; of the rich, as well as of the poor; of the godly, as well as of the ungodly: “man is born to it, as the sparks fly upward.” The godly indeed have, in some respects, a larger measure of it than others: for, from within, they have grounds of trouble which are unknown to others; and, from without, they are beset on every side with enemies, who hate them purely for their righteousness’ sake. Amongst all the saints of whom we read in Scripture, David seems to have been peculiarly distinguished as “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” In the early part of his life, his persecutions from Saul kept him in continual jeopardy of his life: and during all his latter years, his own children furnished him with occasions of sorrow, which at times sunk him into the deepest distress, and rendered him weary even of life. The psalm before us was written on one of these occasions; we suppose at the time of Absalom’s rebellion. And so greatly was he oppressed in spirit, that he would gladly have fled to the ends of the earth, with the loss of all his honours and dignities, if he could but have obtained rest from his accumulated and overwhelming afflictions: he said, “O that

I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest."

This being by no means an uncommon sentiment, I will shew,

I. What are the occasions which usually give rise to this wish—

The wish itself necessarily presupposes a state of trouble; and it may arise in the bosom,

1. From temporal troubles—

[Afflictions do not lose their nature when they visit the godly. Piety may soften their pungency; but it does not divest them of their proper qualities: "they are not joyous to any, but grievous;" as God has condescended to declare. How grievous David's trial was, may be seen in all the preceding context: "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me! I mourn in my complaint and make a noise: my heart is sore pained within me; and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me." Nor do we wonder at this language, when we consider that his own son had driven him from his throne; that many of his subjects were in rebellion against him; and that there was about to be a conflict between two portions of them, the one headed by himself, and the other led on by his son; and that, whichever might be victorious, it must be the blood of his subjects only that must flow. Well might he wish to withdraw from such a distressing scene, and well might he express himself in those mournful terms, "O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest." And though such scenes are rare, it is by no means uncommon to find in families troubles of such an overwhelming nature, as to make life itself a burthen to those who are afflicted by them. Husbands and wives, parents and children, who ought to be sources of the sublimest happiness to each other, are not unfrequently occasions to each other of the deepest woe; a woe that embitters their whole lives, and makes them pant for death as a relief. And where there is no particular evil committed either by the head or members, there will often arise, from the dispensations of Providence, such afflictions as prove an insupportable burthen to the mind. In Job, for instance, we see, from his accumulated trials, the same effect produced as from the afflictions of David. He wished that in his early infancy he had been consigned to the grave, "where the wicked cease

from troubling, and where the weary are at rest." "Wherefore," says he, "is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; who long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures? There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master^a." In truth, almost all the suicides of which we hear originate in worldly sorrow, either personal or domestic: nor is it always found that piety itself is sufficient to counterbalance the effects of temporal calamity; so as to elevate the spirits which have been broken by it, and restore the constitution that has been destroyed.]

2. From spiritual troubles—

[Of these, none can judge, but those who have endured them. In reference to these it may well be said, "The spirit of man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear^b?" Truly, when a man is bowed down under a sense of sin, and trembling under apprehensions of God's wrath, he may well be dejected, and wish for any thing which may pacify his fears and terminate his sorrows. Great as Job's other troubles were, this was heavier than them all. Hear his complaint under it: "O that my grief were thoroughly weighed, and my calamity laid in the balances together! for now it would be heavier than the sand of the sea: therefore my words are swallowed up. For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. O that I might have my request! that God would grant me the thing that I long for, even that it would please God to destroy me^c!" Terrible, beyond measure, are the hidings of God's face under such circumstances: so at least David felt them to be: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps: thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Lord, why castest thou off my soul? why hidest thou thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted^d." So it is with some at this time; they go mourning all the day long; and by their anticipations of God's wrath, feel almost the commencement of it in their souls. The Saviour himself deprecated this bitter cup, and complained of the hidings of God's face in his extremity: well, therefore, may frail men, who are crushed before the moth, implore "the staying of God's rough wind in the day of his east wind^e."]

Seeing, then, that the wish of David is common in the world, let us inquire,

^a Job iii. 17—21. ^b Prov. xviii. 14. ^c Job vi. 2, 3, 4, 8, 9.

^d Ps. lxxxviii. 7, 8, 14, 15.

^e Isai. xxvii. 8.

II. How far the godly are at liberty to indulge it—

Certainly we are at liberty to wish for death: for St. Paul “desired to depart, and to be with Christ,” which he deemed far better than the happiest state on earth: and we all are encouraged to be “looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of the day of Christ.” But the wish then becomes evil, when it is attended with impatience, or has respect to a mere deliverance from present troubles. This distinction is clearly marked by St. Paul, in the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burthened; *not that we would be unclothed*, but clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life^f.” It was not so much to get rid of the storms and tempests to which he was exposed in this present life, as to obtain the glory and felicity of a better world. And this was a highly commendable state of mind. But when we long merely to be released from the troubles of life, and the conflicts which we are here called to sustain, we do not well: for we should be content,

1. That God should glorify himself in his own way—

[God sends trials to his people, in order that he may afford them such effectual succour as shall advance his glory in the world. The trial of gold by fire is precious, because it purifies without consuming the gold: but “the trial of our faith is infinitely more precious,” because it purifies the souls of men: and it will, therefore, “be to the praise and honour and glory of our God, in the great day of his appearing^g.” On the part of those who occasion trials to his people he is dishonoured: “but in the steadfastness of his people he is glorified^h.” Even in the sufferings of our blessed Lord this end was obtained; and therefore, though he deprecated sufferings as he was entitled to do, he submitted to bear his cross for the sake of reflecting glory on his heavenly Father: “Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy nameⁱ.” Thus, if only in the event God may be glorified in us, we should be willing to bear any sufferings, or sustain any conflicts, which God, in his wisdom, may see fit to lay upon us.]

^f 2 Cor. v. 4.

^h 1 Pet. iv. 14.

^g 1 Pet. i. 7.

ⁱ John xii. 27, 28.

2. That he should complete his work in his own way—

[He calls all his people to bear their cross, in imitation of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now “the Lord Jesus, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered:” and “he was made perfect through sufferings;” and in the same way does God still teach and perfect us. He makes tribulation the way to glory; purging us from our corruptions by means of it^k, and causing it to “work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory^l.” Does it become us, then, to be impatient under our troubles; or to wish for the removal of them, before they have accomplished the end for which they were sent? Surely we should be infinitely more anxious to have them sanctified, than to get them removed: and, however sorely they may press upon us, we should say, “Not my will, but thine be done.” Be the furnace never so hot, we should welcome it, if only at last we may come out of it “vessels of honour, meet for the Master’s use.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have hitherto been exempt from heavy trials—

[Doubtless, as far as the mere exemption from trouble goes, you have reason to be thankful: but yet, if for want of it you are yet in a careless or lukewarm state, you have no great reason to congratulate yourselves: it were better that every bone in your body were broken, or that you should have the sword of the Almighty inflicting the deepest wounds in your souls, than that you should be left to go on wickedly in the way of your hearts. I say not that you should pray for trials: for trials will do you no good, if they be not sanctified to your souls by the Spirit of God. But this I say, Let no rest satisfy you, except that which is to be found in the favour of a reconciled God, and in the hope of his glory— — —]

2. Those who are sinking under the weight of them—

[Peradventure some may be here, who, like David, are bowed down under the weight of domestic troubles, or under a dread of God’s heavy displeasure. And, if this be the case, let me tell you where you may find rest unto your souls. You need not the wings of a dove to fly away: you have your refuge close at hand, even Jesus, who says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” If you will but run to Him, you shall find him “an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land^m.” Yes, in truth, “He is a strength to the

^k Isai. xxvii. 9. Heb. xii. 10. ^l 2 Cor. iv. 17. ^m Isai. xxxii. 2.

poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall^a." Go to him then; take refuge in him; cast yourselves upon him; and let him give you rest, in his own time and way. Then will he walk with you in the furnace, as he did with the Hebrew youths; and in due season add you to the happy number of "those who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb^b." Then will your rest be glorious indeed: for "then you will hunger no more, nor thirst any more; neither shall the sun rest on you, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed you, and shall lead you unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes^p."]

^a Isai. xxv. 4.

^b Rev. vii. 14.

^p Rev. vii. 16, 17.

DXCV.

VOWS TO BE PERFORMED.

Ps. lvi. 12. *Thy vows are upon me, O God; I will render praises unto thee.*

VOWS were encouraged under the Mosaic Law^a; and many particular rules were given in relation to them^b. Nor are they altogether discouraged under the Christian dispensation. On the contrary, they are spoken of by the prophets as no less adapted to our state, than they were to the state of the Jews under the Mosaic economy^c. Where they relate to any particular act which is not otherwise required of us, I confess I think them not very advisable. They are for the most part calculated rather to ensnare than to edify the soul^d. But, where they are only a more solemn way of binding ourselves to the performance of acknowledged duties, they are as useful to ourselves, and as pleasing to God, as ever.

The particular ordinance which has recently been administered amongst us will lead me to shew you,

I. What vows are upon you—

There are vows of a more particular nature, which may have been secretly made by different individuals;

^a Numb. vi. 2, 5, 21.

^b Numb. xxx. 2—15.

^c Isai. xix. 21. and Nahum i. 15.

^d Prov. xx. 25.

which are more fit for our own personal consideration before God than for any notice on a public occasion like this; and the rather because the points that would be interesting to one or two might excite no interest in the minds of the generality amongst us. But there are vows common to us all; for instance, those made by us,

1. At our baptism—

[When presented at the sacred font, we were, as the Scripture expresses it, “baptized into Christ^e.” As the Israelites, in their passage through the sea, were “baptized unto Moses,” whilst, with a wall of water on their right hand and on their left, they were sprinkled with the surge, and consecrated, as it were, unto the Lord, to embrace the revelation which was then made known to them, and to obey the laws which were then delivered them^f; so we, in our baptism, profess to regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our mighty deliverer, and to obey him as our only Lord. As it was not uncommon in the Apostolic age to baptize also by immersion, St. Paul represents it as being “buried with Christ in baptism into his death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life^g.” In both these views, we see clearly what our vows have been; to believe in Christ, to follow Christ, dying *unto* sin as he died *for* it, and rising to a new and heavenly life, as he on the third day after his crucifixion rose to a life of blessedness and glory at the right hand of God. This was renewed,]

2. At our confirmation—

[As at twelve years of age the Jewish children were presented at the temple, that they might come more fully under the yoke of their Law; so amongst us, at a somewhat later age, are young people called upon to present themselves unto the Lord, and to take upon themselves those engagements which were made for them at their baptism by their sponsors. You well know what the things are which were then promised in your name: first, “that you should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; next, that you should believe all the articles of the Christian faith; and, lastly, that you should keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of your life.” Now, in reference to these very engagements, it was distinctly asked of you by the Bishop, “Do ye here, in the presence of God and of this congregation,

^e Gal. iii. 27.

^f 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

^g Rom. vi. 3, 4.

renew the solemn promise and vow that was made in your name at your baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in your own persons, and acknowledging yourselves bound to believe and to do all those things which your godfathers and godmothers then undertook for you?" And then "every one of you audibly and distinctly answered, I do." Remember, then, that all these vows are upon you. They are not to be regarded as empty words, which might, at the close of the ceremony, be forgotten. No, indeed; by them your souls are bound: and every one who does not labour to carry them into effect, contracts the heaviest guilt; his whole life being one continued act of lying unto God.]

3. At the table of the Lord—

[Those of us who have attained to fuller age have, for the most part, been frequent communicants at the Lord's supper; as it is to be hoped that many of you, my young friends, will ere long be: for I must say to you, that your confirmation is intended to be a preparation for that holy ordinance; and is of no real utility to you, if it be not followed up by a total surrender of yourselves to God at the table of your Lord. Now, at the Lord's table we give up ourselves wholly to the Lord. The word "sacrament," by which that ordinance is often designated, refers to the oath which the Roman soldiers took to be faithful to their General: such an oath we all take, as it were, when we eat the body, and drink the blood, of our Lord and Saviour at his table. We engage to be "good soldiers of Jesus Christ," and never to forsake his standard, but to be faithful unto him even unto death. The difference between our engagements at the three different periods is this: at our baptism the promises were made for us by our sponsors; at our confirmation we took upon ourselves all that had been engaged in our behalf; and at the Lord's table we carry it all, as it were, into effect; and, by an open recognition of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and our Lord, we declare before all, that we are determined, through grace, to live and die in his sacred cause; having no hope but in his atoning blood; no strength but in his grace; no rule but his revealed will; no end of life but the glory of his name.]

Such being the vows of God that are upon us, let us consider,

II. The obligations thereby entailed upon us—

These vows are to be performed: for "it were better never to vow at all, than to vow and not pay^h."

^h Eccl. v. 4, 5.

The least that we can do is, “to render praises to the Lord:” and this we should do,

1. In a way of devout acknowledgment—

[This was the way in which David performed his vows: “I will go into thy house with burnt-offerings: I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth hath spoken when I was in trouble. I will offer unto thee burnt-sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer bullocks with goatsⁱ.” This was fitted to the dispensation under which he lived: but under the Christian dispensation nothing of this kind is required: the sacrifice of a grateful heart is that which alone will prove acceptable to our God. For so it is said; “Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God *thanksgiving*, and pay thy *vows* unto the Most High^k.” And say, whether there be not abundant ground for praise and thanksgiving? That you were ever dedicated to the Lord in baptism, have you not reason to be thankful for *that*? Think of the heathen world, who in their infancy are devoted only to some base idol, which, so far from being able to confer a benefit on them, is not capable of even protecting itself from being broken to pieces and cast into the fire: how much better is it to be consecrated to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him!” Again, to have taken upon yourselves now all your baptismal vows, in order to the being confirmed and strengthened by Almighty God for the performance of them; what is this but to have set off already in your Christian course, and to be proceeding, as it were, in the high road to heaven? As for those who have been fed from time to time with the body and blood of Christ, and have been thereby established, strengthened, settled in the ways of God, methinks “the very stones would cry out against them,” if they did not sing and shout aloud for joy. To all of you, then, I recommend the adoption of David’s purpose, and of David’s words: “What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. *I will pay my vows* now in the presence of all his people. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. *I will pay my vows* now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the Lord!”]

2. In a way of total surrender of yourselves to God—

[This, beyond a doubt, is the true object of all our vows; and without this no transient purposes or emotions will be of

ⁱ Ps. lxvi. 13—15.

^k Ps. l. 13, 14.

¹ Ps. cxvi. 12—14, 17—19.

any value. And this is what St. Paul most earnestly recommends: "I beseech you, Brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service^m." In presenting *voluntary* oblations to the Lord, there were some peculiar encouragements afforded, to which I will call your more especial attention. First, of the offerings so presented, the offerers themselves partook: so that Almighty God, who was represented by the altar that consumed the memorial; and the priests, to whose support a good measure of the offering was assigned; and the offerer himself; all, if I may so speak, feasted together. Next, the vow or voluntary offering might be presented "with *leavened bread*:" yes, notwithstanding leaven was prohibited, most strictly prohibited, in all other offerings, it might be presented in *this*, because God would shew his special approbation of *this*, and his willingness to condescend to the infirmities of those who desired to honour him, though they could not honour him to the extent they desired. And, lastly, whereas in an offering of *thanksgiving* the offerer could only partake on the day that he presented his offering, in that which he presented as a *vow*, he might *partake the second day, as well as the first*; that so he might have a full, a rich, an abiding enjoyment of the sacrifice, which, of his own free will, and without any necessity imposed upon him, he had vowed unto the Lordⁿ. And now, after this, shall I need to multiply words in order to induce you, Brethren, to surrender up yourselves unto the Lord? No: I need only shew you in what way God has prescribed it to be done under the very dispensation under which we live: "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten^o." Do *this*, my Beloved, and it will be the best possible completion of your vows. Go to God, as not your own, but His: go to him as bought with a price, even with the precious blood of his only dear Son; and from this moment live wholly unto him, that ye may "glorify him in your body, and in your spirit, which are his^p."]

^m Rom. xii. 1.

ⁿ See Lev. vii. 11—16. Mark the distinction between ver. 12. and ver. 16.

^o Jer. l. 4, 5.

^p 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.

DXCVI.

DAVID'S LOVE TO GOD.

Ps. lviii. 7—11. *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.*

HERE we behold the bosom of a saint laid open, and the inmost recesses of his heart exposed to view. We cannot read the words without being more or less impressed with this thought, O that my soul were in such a state as his! Indeed the Psalmist himself judged this record of his experience to be of more than ordinary importance to the Church: and therefore, at a subsequent period, he detached these words from the context in which they stand, and made them the commencement of a separate psalm^a; intimating thereby, that they were not only proper to be used on occasion of any great deliverance, like that which had just been vouchsafed to him in the wilderness of En-gedi, (where Saul had sought to destroy him^b;) but that our frame of mind at all times should be such as was there expressed.

Let us observe,

I. The grounds of his love to God—

From the particular mercy which he had received, he was led to contemplate God's wonderful perfection; and particularly to admire,

1. The extent of his mercy—

[The temporal deliverance itself was a rich display of mercy, because it bespoke the watchful care of God over one, who, as a sinner, might rather have been an object of his displeasure. But David looked beyond the immediate occasion of his gratitude, and viewed the mercy of God towards his soul. David knew himself to be a sinner, and that, if God should enter into judgment with him, he must inevitably and eternally perish. Nor was he ignorant of the means which

^a Ps. cviii.^b 1 Sam. xxiv.

God had provided for the redemption of his soul. Not even Isaiah himself prophesied more fully, or more minutely, respecting the sufferings and glory of the Messiah, than David did. Hence, viewing himself as a redeemed sinner, bought with the blood of God's only dear Son, he could not but adore the boundless extent of God's mercy towards him: "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens."

This must be the foundation of love in us also. Our blessed Lord has told us, that "they who have much forgiven will love much; but those who have but little forgiven will love little^c." There is no one so ignorant or obdurate, but that he will acknowledge that God is merciful: but the hopes of the generality are founded, not so much on the extent of God's mercy, as on the smallness of the occasion which they have for the exercise of it: and hence they are never penetrated with any deep sense of it as exercised towards them. But a person duly sensible of the greatness of his sins, will form a corresponding estimate of God's mercies; which will appear to him, "as the heavens, great" and without limit; insomuch, that he will be able to find no terms whereby to express his views of them more justly than those of David in another psalm; "As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy to them that fear him^d."

Let this be borne in mind, that all our love to God must have its origin in a knowledge of ourselves: since it is only from a view of our own extreme guilt and helplessness that we can appreciate in any degree the patience and forbearance, the mercy and loving-kindness, which, from our earliest infancy to this present hour, he has exercised towards us — — —]

2. The inviolability of his truth—

[God had promised to David, that in due time he should sit upon the throne of Israel: and the many signal deliverances which he had received, all tended to confirm in his mind an expectation of the promised blessing. And it is remarkable, that Saul himself was struck with those particular occurrences precisely in that view: "Now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand^e." Hence "the truth" and faithfulness of God appeared to him as no less worthy of admiration than his love and mercy.

And will not every one who has ever laid hold upon the promises of the Gospel, and found them verified in his own experience, fix his mind upon this attribute of the Deity with grateful adoration? Will he not even find in his own soul a more impressive evidence of the truth of God, than in the

^c Luke vii. 47. ^d Ps. ciii. 11. ^e 1 Sam. xxiv. 20.

whole universe besides? The very circumstance of his having been preserved by the power of God amidst so many snares and temptations, whilst so many, who once appeared in a more hopeful state than he, have made shipwreck of their faith, will fill his soul with rapture, and constrain him to say, "The Lord my God changeth not; and therefore it is that I am not consumed^f." Others may prove by arguments the truth of God, at the same time that they have no admiring or adoring thoughts of it; but *he* will regard himself as a living witness of this glorious perfection; and will both think and speak of it as one who is even lost with wonder in the contemplation of it.]

Such were the grounds of David's love to God. We next proceed to notice,

II. His expression of it—

Full of ardour,

1. He determines to praise and glorify God to the uttermost—

[The determination of his soul he thus declares: "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." Here is the result of deep conviction. He knew his obligations to God: and, whether others would concur with him or not, his purpose was unalterable: if no other creature in the universe would praise God, *he* would. He felt it to be his bounden duty: nor should all the sneers of an ungodly world divert him from the performance of it.

But, feeling that his sluggish heart did not obey the call as he could wish, he chides his soul: "Awake up, my glory," my tongue, by which alone I can ascribe to God the honour due unto his name: "awake, psaltery and harp," with which I am accustomed to celebrate his praise: "I myself," with all my faculties and all my powers, "will awake early," and reproach, as it were, the tardiness of the morning dawn.

Nor would he be content with praising God amidst his own family circle; he would praise him among the whole Jewish "people," yes, and amidst "all the nations" of the world; that so the whole universe, both Jews and Gentiles, might learn to love and honour the God of his salvation.

Now here we see the way in which all our souls should be engaged. Under a deep sense of the goodness of our God, we should feel such a determination of heart as nothing can shake: we should be saying with Joshua, "Though all Israel should depart from God, I and my house will serve the Lord^g." From time to time we should stir up ourselves to this holy exercise, and labour to bring our minds to a frame suited to the occasion.

^f Mal. iii. 6.

^g Josh. xxiv. 15.

Nor should we be satisfied with approving ourselves to God in secret: we should honour him in the face of the whole world, and endeavour to prevail with all to unite with us in a duty so urgent, so reasonable, so delightful.]

2. He begs of God also to exalt and glorify himself—

[Sensible that, with all his efforts, he could affect but few, he entreats God to shew forth his own glory, and, by augmented displays of it, to “exalt himself above heaven and earth.” Thus to the same effect he addresses Jehovah in another psalm; “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty! with thy glory and thy majesty; and in thy majesty ride prosperously in the cause of meekness and truth and righteousness; and let thy right hand teach thee terrible things^h.” In the 148th Psalm, his whole employment from beginning to end is to call on all the different creatures in heaven and earth, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate, to unite, according to their respective powers, in glorifying God.]

Such then should be our prayer also: the manifestation of God’s glory should be so dear to us, that we should have no wish, no thought, no desire in comparison of it.]

ADDRESS—

That you may attain a greater measure of David’s piety,

1. Study the divine character, as illustrated in his dealings with you—

[To mark the dispensations of Providence and grace is good: but it will be of little service, unless we mark the perfections of God as displayed in his dealings with us. See, for instance, how multiplied your transgressions against him have been, and how wonderful has been his forbearance in not cutting you off in your sins, and making you monuments of his indignation, like the rebellious Israelites of old, or like Ananias and Sapphira in the Apostolic age! Call to mind how ready he has been at all times to receive you to his favour; and, in answer to your prayers, to send you fresh supplies of grace, or mercy, or peace, according to your necessities. Mark your various backslidings; and contrast with these the richness of his communications to you: and then say, “Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercyⁱ.” The sense of God’s excellency which you obtain from other sources will be speculative, superficial, transient; but that which you derive from his dealings with you will be deep, practical, abiding — — —]

^h Ps. xlv. 3, 4.

ⁱ Mic. vii. 18.

2. Seek to have the dispositions of your minds suited to his dispensations towards you—

[What are the feelings which his mercy and truth should generate in your soul? Should they not be those of admiration, and love, and gratitude, and affiance? Should they not be also those of holy zeal in his service? Should they not be accompanied with a desire that the whole world should know him? Here then you see precisely what should be the state of your mind from day to day. *This* is piety: *this* is religion. Religion is not a matter of dispute, but of practice; and not of mere morals, but of spiritual feeling, similar to that which is expressed in my text, and venting itself in such language as this: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name: bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits^k." This is your *duty*, shall I say? No: it is your *privilege*: and it is a very antepast of heaven. May God in his mercy diffuse amongst us this spirit more and more, and attune all our hearts to sing without ceasing the praises of our God!]

^k Ps. ciii. 1, 2.

DXCVII.

GOD'S BANNER OVER HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. lx. 4. *Thou hast given a banner to them that feared thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.*

THIS psalm, in the title of it, is called "Michtam," a golden psalm; and it well deserves the name. It was written by David after he had come to the full possession of the kingdom, which, during the reign of Saul^a, and during the seven years' division of the tribes under Ishbosheth^b, had been reduced to a very low condition: "God had shewed his people hard things, and made them to drink the wine of astonishment." But the union of all Israel under David, and the victories they had already gained over their powerful and oppressive adversaries the Philistines, were tokens of God's returning favour to them, and a pledge to them that all his promised blessings should in due season be poured out upon them. It should seem as if the more pious part of the people had been discouraged by the long continuance of this

^a 1 Sam. xxxi. 7.

^b 2 Sam. v. 4, 5.

adversity ; and had begun almost to despair of ever seeing their hopes realized, respecting the extension and stability of their national power. But David tells them, that, in his advancement to the kingdom, and in their recent successes, “ God had given them a banner,” and had unfurled it, as it were, before their eyes, as a signal of his presence in the midst of them, and as a pledge of victory over all their enemies.

What God did for them as a pledge of temporal advancement, he has done for his people in all ages, to assure them of success in their spiritual warfare.

To illustrate this, I will shew,

I. What banners God has given us—

The Church has a warfare to maintain : and, if, human prowess alone were considered, it is a warfare which would afford not the smallest prospect of success. But God has given to us a banner,

1. In the elevation of his Son—

[David was an eminent type of Christ, and especially in the advancement of his kingdom : for Christ was appointed “ to sit upon the throne of David for ever and ever.” Was David’s elevation then a banner ? so also is that of Christ, who is now seated at the right hand of God, above all the principalities and powers whether of earth or hell. Believer, survey thy Lord. Remember him in the manger, in the garden, on the cross, and in the grave. From a view of him in those scenes thou wouldst be ready to say, There is no hope. But behold him risen, ascended, glorified, and in full possession of his kingdom : and then say, What a change awaits *you* after your present conflicts^c. His triumphs are a pledge of yours : “ because he liveth, you shall live also :” and “ as he has overcome and is set down with his Father upon his throne,” so shall you, in your victories and in your triumphs, resemble him^d.]

2. In the records of his word—

[Behold, what “ a cloud of witnesses” present themselves to your view ! Read the catalogue of worthies, as recorded by God himself. Are your trials heavier than theirs^e ? Or is the power that was sufficient for them withheld from you ? Will not faith bring Omnipotence to your support, even as it did for them ? They are set before you expressly for your encourage-

^c Eph. i. 19, 20.

^d Luke xxii. 29, 30. Rev. iii. 21.

^e Heb. xi. 33—38.

ment, that *you*, seeing how *they* have succeeded, may be stirred up "to run your race with patience, looking unto Jesus as the author and finisher of *your* faith," even as he was of *theirs*^f. Are you weak? so were they. Are your enemies numerous and mighty? so were theirs. Did they prevail through the grace of Christ? that same "grace shall be sufficient for you:" for He is the same gracious and Almighty Friend as ever: time has made no change in him: "his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor is his ear heavy, that he cannot hear^g:" as "he was mighty in them, so will he also be in you:" and "his strength shall be perfected in your weakness," even as it was in theirs^h.]

3. In the experience of his saints—

[You have found a change in your views, desires, pursuits: tell me, Whence has this change proceeded? Must you not say, "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing is God?" If you will look within, you will find that you have rather resisted the change than helped it forward. "Your carnal mind has been enmity against God:" and it would have been so still, if God, by the light of his word, and the influences of his Spirit, had not subdued it to himself. If, then, the heart of stone has been taken away, and a heart of flesh been given to you, that is itself "a banner" erected in your heart, a token of God's presence, an earnest of his power, and a pledge of yet richer mercies in reserve: for, "if it have pleased him to make you of the number of his people, he will not forsake you^k;" and you may "be confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work within you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ^l."]

Let us consider,

II. For what end they are displayed unto us—

As the banner given to Israel in the time of David was to confirm their faith in his promises, and to assure them of God's faithfulness, so are the banners which God has given to us bestowed,

1. To confirm our confidence in him—

[We ought to "know in whom we have believed," and to feel assured that he is both "able and willing to keep that which we have committed to him^m." We should never forget who it is that is engaged for us. We should never forget that in God we have a *wisdom* that cannot be circumvented, and a

^f Heb. xii. 1, 2.

^g Isai. lix. 1.

^h 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 5.

^k 1 Sam. xii. 22.

^l Phil. i. 6.

^m 2 Tim. i. 12.

power that cannot be withstood. In him, too, we have a *faithfulness* that is altogether inviolate and incapable of change. What, then, have we to fear? The serpent, no doubt, is subtle, and the devices of Satan are very deep; but can he elude the eye of our heavenly Protector, or by any means defeat His purpose? Our enemies too, both within and without, are mighty: but what have we to fear, who have a Protector that is Almighty? "If God be for us, who can be against usⁿ?" Let our enemies be ever so numerous, we may safely affirm that "they who be with us, are more than they who be with them^o;" and if we have no more than a lamp and a trumpet against an armed host, we shall in Jehovah's name prevail against them all^p. A stone out of the brook shall suffice us to destroy our mightiest adversary; yea, his own sword shall serve us for the instrument whereby to complete our triumph^q.]

2. To assure us of victory over all our enemies—

[Amongst men, a banner is only a signal to enlist them for the combat: but with God it is a pledge of victory. See how David regarded it: "In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye then to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? for, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at him that is perfect; and, if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? The Lord is in his holy temple: the Lord's throne is in heaven^r:" and, whilst he is there, you need not attempt to alarm me: I know my security, and defy the efforts of all my enemies. It was this consideration that enabled Paul also to hurl defiance at his enemies, and to assure himself of victory, as much as if it had been already gained^s—— And we also, in dependence on our God, may dismiss every fear, and anticipate, as already ours, the glory and felicity that await us^t.]

APPLICATION—

What now can I say more but this?

1. Fear God—

[You will observe, that *this is the description of the persons to whom his banner was given*: and for them is the same privilege reserved in every age. Let not any undervalue this grace; for, in truth, it is that which as assuredly interests us in the divine favour as love itself. Of course, it is a filial fear of which we speak: and he who possesses that, may divest himself of every other fear; "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, or of the son of man, that

ⁿ Rom. viii. 31.

^o 2 Kings vi. 16, 17.

^p Judg. vii. 15—22.

^q 1 Sam. xvii. 49—51.

^r Ps. xi. 1—4.

^s Rom. viii. 33—39.

^t 2 Cor. v. 1—4. 2 Tim. iv. 8.

shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker?" Beloved Brethren, "sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself in your hearts, and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread^x."]]

2. Trust in God—

[Excellent was that resolution of the Psalmist, "In the name of our God we will set up our banners^y." It is not possible for our confidence to be too strong, provided only it be humble. There are, I confess, two different kinds of confidence, which yet I consider as dangerous in the extreme: one of them is founded upon systematic notions of divine truth, without any mixture of holy fear; and the other arises from some dream or vision, or enthusiastic conceit, about the word coming to their mind in a peculiar way. Against both of these I would guard you with all my might. The only confidence that is pleasing to God is that which is softened with fear, and tempered with contrition. Let that be in exercise to the utmost possible extent, and then you may adopt the entire language of this psalm: "I will rejoice; I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is the strength of mine head; Judah is my lawgiver: Moab is my wash-pot; over Edom will I cast out my shoe: Philistia, triumph thou because of me." The plain import of all which is concentrated in the concluding verse, "Through God I shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down my enemies." Only trust in God; and then, in every place where you go, you may behold an altar with this inscription: "Jehovah-Nissi, The Lord is my banner^z." Yea, the very graces which you exercise shall be in you a pledge, that God will fulfil and perfect in you the good work he has begun.]

^y Isai. li. 12, 13.

^x Isai. viii. 12, 13.

^y Ps. xx. 5.

^z Exod. xvii. 15.

DXCVIII.

ADVICE TO THE AFFLICTED.

Ps. lxi. 2. *From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.*

IN whatever situation we be, we shall find both consolation in the promises, and direction in the examples, that are recorded for our use in the Sacred Writings. But in seasons of affliction principally, will the holy Oracles be found precious, because they

exhibit to us God's dearest children in similar circumstances, and point out to us the means, which they, in their troubles, found effectual for their relief.

In recommending the example of David, we shall,

I. Mention some seasons wherein our hearts are apt to be overwhelmed—

This is a vale of tears to all: but to some more especially,

1. From temporal calamities—

[Bodily pains, loss of friends^a, embarrassed circumstances, will weigh down the spirits even of the best. And though, at times, religion will enable them to triumph in the midst of all their tribulations, yet its more common operation is, to moderate their grief, to produce resignation in their souls, and to sanctify the affliction to their spiritual advancement.]

2. From spiritual troubles—

[The *first convictions* of penitents are often accompanied with the deepest anguish; insomuch that, if God did not support them by a hope of his mercy, they might, like Judas, destroy themselves in utter despair. Their *subsequent views* also of *their indwelling corruptions* are frequently attended with such dejection, as quite to enervate the body and overwhelm the soul^b. If to these be added *the hidings of God's face*, the soul may have a foretaste even of hell itself in the miseries that it endures^c.]

3. From the near prospect of death—

[To a person enjoying the divine presence, death has no terrors^d: it is a welcome messenger, that cannot come too soon. But to one in spiritual darkness and desertion, it is inexpressibly dreadful; and the whole world would appear but a small price to pay for the respite of a few days. The ungodly, it is true, too often die as insensible as the beasts: but the godly, who know the terrors of the Lord, cannot pass through that dreary valley without extreme horror, unless they have an inward witness of their acceptance with God^e.]

The example in the text may serve as a model, while we endeavour to,

II. Shew how we should conduct ourselves in those seasons—

^a 2 Sam. xviii. 33. ^b Isai. xxxv. 3, 4. Rom. vii. 24.

^c Ps. lxxvii. 2—9. N. B. "*overwhelmed*." ^d Phil. i. 21, 23.

^e Ps. lv. 4, 5. and perhaps Isai. xxxviii. 10—14.

1. To speak *generally*, we should betake ourselves to prayer—

[God is the only source of strength and consolation. If we apply to the creature in our distress, we shall invariably find him but a broken reed^f. On the contrary, the pressure that is on our minds will, for the most part, increase: or, if the trouble be removed, the removal will prove a heavier judgment than its continuance. But if we apply with humility to a throne of grace, the desired effect will almost instantly appear^g. There is no trouble from which prayer has not extricated the sons of men: it prolonged the life of Hezekiah^h; brought Jonah from the bottom of the seaⁱ; and restored to peace the tempest-tossed soul of David^k. For us also, if it be fervent, it shall effectually prevail^l: there is no disquietude which it shall not pacify, “no sorrow which it shall not turn into songs of joy^m.” Wherever we are therefore, even “at the very ends of the earth,” and however circumstanced, we should make our requests known unto God, in order to the attainment of solid peaceⁿ.]

2. More *particularly*, we should beg of God to lead us to the Saviour—

[David, though a king, had no sufficiency in himself: he was forced to look to one higher than himself, even to Jesus, the Rock of his salvation^o. But how should he come to Jesus, unless the Father should draw him^p? Hence he prayed so fervently, that God would “lead” him to that Rock. Thither then must we also go; for there alone can we find stability. Does guilt appal us? nothing but the blood of Jesus can compose our minds^q. Do temptations harass us? nothing but his grace can enable us to withstand them^r. Do accumulated troubles threaten to overwhelm us? we can both do and suffer all things, if HE strengthen us; yea, we shall be more than conquerors through him that loved us^s. Like a shipwrecked mariner standing on a rock, we may defy the waves that roar beneath our feet. Such was the experience of David himself^t; and such shall be ours also, if the storms that threaten us drive us for security to that place of safety. Let us then, in every affliction, look to Jesus as our help; and, with a deep impression of our inability to go to him aright, let us cry unto God, “Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!”]

^f Hos. v. 14. Isai. xxxi. 3.

^h 2 Kings xx. 1—6. ⁱ Jonah ii. 1—7.

^l Jam. v. 16.

^m Ps. l. 15.

^o Ps. lxxxix. 19.

^p John vi. 44.

^r 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^s Rom. viii. 37.

^t Ps. xl. 1—3. N. B. “the rock.”

^g Isai. lxxv. 24.

^k Ps. cxvi. 3—8.

ⁿ Phil. iv. 6, 7.

^q Acts xvi. 29—31.

ADDRESS—

1. Those who experience no overwhelming troubles—

[However serene the sky at present be, no man knows how soon a storm may arise. But supposing our voyage through life be ever so favourable, it must come to an end: and what shall we do in the hour of death without an interest in Christ? Above all, what must become of us, if we be not fixed upon that Rock at the day of judgment? Let us then improve our tranquil hours in securing an establishment on Christ Jesus; that, however suddenly calamities may come, or death may summon us into the presence of our God, we may be found standing immovably on the Rock of ages. Then, like Noah, shall we rejoice in God's favour, when thoughtless myriads shall be overwhelmed in the deluge of his wrath.]

2. Those who are bowed down under trouble—

[You are but too apt to carry your complaints to men, instead of spreading them before God. What wonder then you find no deliverance? Has not David told you, that this was his very experience; and that nothing but the use of this remedy afforded him relief^u? Chide then, and resist, your backwardness to prayer. Lay the blame, not on God, who is willing to impart help, but on yourselves, who are unwilling to implore it. Your troubles are sent on purpose to drive you to the Saviour, whom, in a time of prosperity, you are too prone to neglect: and if you suffer them to produce that effect, you shall soon number them amongst your richest blessings.]

^u Ps. xxxii. 3—5.

DXCIX.

GOD OUR ONLY AND ALL-SUFFICIENT HELP.

Ps. lxii. 5—8. *My soul, wait thou only upon God: for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.*

THERE is scarcely any thing that more offends the ignorant and ungodly, than a profession of maintaining fellowship with Jehovah, and of receiving from him certain communications which are unknown to the world at large. Such pretensions are considered by them as the offspring of spiritual pride

and incurable presumption. But it will scarcely be supposed that the Gospel has reduced us to a lower state than was enjoyed under the law, or deprived us of privileges that were possessed under that less perfect dispensation: yet behold, with what intimate access to God the Psalmist was favoured, and what communion with him he teaches every contrite sinner to expect! It is worthy of observation, that in this psalm there is not one single petition, or thanksgiving: the whole of it is occupied in stating what comfort he found in God, and in encouraging others to expect the same. Especially in the words which we have just read, we see,

I. His happy experience—

Great and manifold were David's trials, from his earliest youth even to his dying hour. But "in all he encouraged himself in the Lord his God:"

He waited upon God as his all-sufficient help—

[The psalm begins with affirming this: and, in our text, he encourages his soul to persevere in this blessed course: "My soul, wait thou only upon God." As for men, he found that they could not be relied upon: both rich and poor were alike but a broken reed, "a lie and vanity^a." Nor could power or wealth afford any better ground of confidence^b. God alone has the power requisite for supplying the wants of his creatures^c; and therefore "from God alone was all his expectation^d." To him he looked in all his troubles, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. When persecuted by Saul, he fled to his invisible Protector, and took refuge under the shadow of Jehovah's wings — — — In like manner, when assaulted by Satan, his great spiritual adversary, "he gat him to his Lord right humbly," and sought in him that salvation which He alone can give — — — Under all circumstances he considered God as *able, willing, yea and pledged* too, to deliver him: and to him he ran, as to a strong tower, in which he found unfailing security. As to the time and manner of his deliverance, he left that entirely to God.]

He found in God all that his diversified necessities required—

[He was never disappointed of his hope. The many miraculous escapes which he experienced, testify that God was ever nigh at hand to help him — — — and the peace and stability which he obtained in his soul after his most grievous fall,

^a ver. 9. ^b ver. 10. ^c ver. 11. ^d ver. 5.

manifestly prove, how exceedingly the grace of God was magnified towards him — — — We wonder not at his frequent repetition of the same acknowledgments^e, or at the augmented confidence with which he was enabled to look forward to a continuance of the Divine favour even unto death^f.]

But from this experience he was fully qualified to give—

II. His advice founded upon it—

To wait on God is the duty of every living creature, and especially of those who are instructed in the knowledge of his revealed will. “He is the one source of every good and perfect gift.” On him therefore David advises us to wait,

1. In a way of earnest prayer—

[We should not merely call upon God, but “pour out our hearts before him.” If our troubles be of a more public nature, we should, like Hezekiah, spread our wants before him^g: or, if they be known to ourselves alone, we should, like Hannah, carry them to the Lord^h. The direction given us by God himself is, that “*in every thing* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we should make our requests known unto Godⁱ.” We should not say of one thing, It is too great for me to ask; or of another thing, It is too small: we should remember, that “he will be inquired of by us,” before he will communicate to us his promised blessings^k: and, if we ask in faith, he will “do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we either ask or think.”]

2. In a way of confident expectation—

[We should “not stagger at any of God’s promises, but be strong in faith, giving glory to God.” If he see fit to delay his answer, we must not be discouraged, but wait his time; assured, that “the vision shall not tarry” beyond the precise moment that he sees to be best for us^l. We must trust him no less when we see no way for our deliverance^m, than when the promised relief is visibly at hand. Under all the endearing characters which are assigned to him in our text, we should expect his gracious interposition. If our difficulties and trials be of a temporal nature, we should anticipate with confidence his effectual aidⁿ; and if of a spiritual nature, we should feel

^e ver. 1, 2. with the text.

^f Compare ver. 2. with ver. 6. “Not greatly moved;” “Not moved at all.”

^g 2 Kings xix. 14.

^h 1 Sam. i. 15.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 6.

^k Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

^l Hab. ii. 3.

^m Isai. l. 10. Isai. xxviii. 16.

ⁿ Isai. l. 7—9.

assured, that none shall finally prevail against us^o: we should confidently say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory."]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are labouring under temporal affliction—

[Those who have no God to go to, often sink under their troubles, and not unfrequently seek refuge from them in suicide. Be ye not like to them. There is a God, whose is the earth, and the fulness thereof, and who feedeth even the ravens that call upon him. Your trials are intended to lead you to him; and if they have this effect, you shall have cause to bless him for them to all eternity. Only remember not to lean to the creature for support. Seek every thing in God; in "God only;" in "God at all times;" and you shall not be disappointed of your hope.]

2. To those who are bowed down with spiritual trouble—

[Hear what instruction the Prophet Jeremiah gives to persons in your state^p. David had sunk under his troubles, if he had not cast his care entirely upon the Lord^q. Follow then his example in this particular: charge it upon yourself to do so; "My soul, wait thou only upon God." And if still distressing fears oppress you, chide your unbelieving soul as he did, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my confidence and my God^r."]

^o Jer. i. 19.

^p Lam. iii. 25, 26. Add to this, Lam. iii. 27, 28, 29.

^q Ps. xxvii. 13, 14. ^r Ps. xlii. 11.

DC.

THE BELIEVER'S DISPOSITIONS TOWARDS GOD.

Ps. lxiii. 1—7. *O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live; I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night-watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.*

IT is justly said of God, that “he giveth songs in the night:” and never was there a more striking evidence of it than in the psalm before us. David is supposed to have written it when he was in the wilderness of Ziph, fleeing from Saul who was seeking to destroy him^a. But we can scarcely conceive that he would call himself “the king,” as he does in the 11th verse, in the life-time of Saul: for though he believed that God would ultimately raise him to the throne, it would have been treason against his legitimate prince to arrogate to himself the title of “king;” nor can we conceive that under his perilous circumstances he would have given Saul so just a ground of accusation against him. For these reasons we are inclined to think it was written at the time that he fled into the wilderness from Absalom, when he, and the people that were with him, were in the greatest distress for every necessary of life^b. But what are the contents of this psalm? Nothing but joy and triumph: the things of time and sense were as nothing in his eyes; but God was “all in all.”

From that portion of the psalm which we have read, we shall take occasion to shew you the *desires*, the *purposes*, and the *expectations* of a renewed soul.

I. The desires—

As soon as the soul has obtained an interest in Christ, and reconciliation with God through him, it is privileged to claim God as its own peculiar portion: it is entitled to say of Christ, “My Beloved is mine, and I am his:” “He has loved *me*, and given himself for *me*.” And to the Father himself also, as now reconciled to him, he can say, “O God, thou art my God.” It is no wonder then, that from henceforth God becomes the one object of his desire.

The soul now finds no satisfaction in earthly things—

[The whole world appears to it as “a land where no water is.” The whole creation seems to be but “a broken cistern,” which, whilst it promises refreshment to the weary and heavy-laden, is never able to impart it.

^a 1 Sam. xxiii. 15.

^b 2 Sam. xvii. 28, 29.

If it be objected, that, though David, under his peculiar trials, found the world so barren of all good, we may find it a source of comfort to us; we answer, That there is nothing in this world that is suited to satisfy the desires of an immortal soul; and that, the more we have of this world, the more fully shall we be convinced, that it is altogether an empty bubble, a cheat, a lie; and that "vanity and vexation of spirit" is written by the finger of God himself upon all that it contains. The carnal mind cannot credit this: but the renewed soul needs no argument to convince it of this truth.]

Its desire therefore is after God alone—

["Early will I seek thee," is the language of every one that is born of God. In the secret chamber his first waking thoughts will be, "Where is God my Maker?" where is Jesus my Redeemer? where is the blessed Spirit my Sanctifier and my Comforter? In the public ordinances also especially will his soul desire communion with its God. It has beheld somewhat of God's power and glory in the manifestations of his love, and in the communications of his grace; and it bears those seasons in remembrance, and longs to have them renewed from time to time. The bare ordinances will not satisfy the believer, if God be not in them: it is not to perform a duty that he comes up to the sanctuary, but to meet his God, and enjoy sweet converse with him: and if he meet not God there, he is like a man who, with much ardent expectation, has gone to a distant city to meet his friend, and has been disappointed of his hope: or rather he is like those of whom the prophet Jeremiah speaks, who in a season of extreme drought "came to the pits and found no water; and returning with their vessels empty, were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads." They know by sad experience that "there is no water" elsewhere; and if they find not access to "God, the living fountain," their very "flesh" sympathizes with their "souls," and fainteth by reason of the painful disappointment. This is beautifully described in another psalm^d: and it is realized in the experience of every believer, in proportion to the integrity of his soul before God, and to the measure of grace with which he is endued — — —]

In perfect correspondence with the desires of a renewed soul, are,

II. Its purposes—

The Believer determines to praise and glorify his God—

[The language of his heart is, "My heart is fixed, O God,

^c Jer. xiv. 3.

^d Ps. xlii. 1—3.

my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise." He knows what God hath said, "Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me:" and he determines to offer unto God the tribute that is so justly due. Nor will he do this in a cold and formal manner: no; as a man of warm feelings expresses with his body the emotions of his soul, so will he, together with his heart, lift up his hands also in the name of his God. Nor will he pour forth these effusions only on some particular occasions, or during any one particular season: he will do it continually; he will do it to the latest hour of his life. He considers "praise as comely for the upright;" and he wishes it to be the constant language of his lips.]

To this determination he is led by the consideration of the loving-kindness of his God—

[O how wonderful does that love appear to him, which gave no less a person than God's co-equal co-eternal Son to die for him! which gave him too the knowledge of that Saviour, together with all spiritual and eternal blessings in him, whilst thousands and millions of the human race are dying in ignorance and perishing in their sins! This loving-kindness so free, so rich, so full, appears to him "better than even life itself;" and all that he can do to testify his gratitude seems nothing, yea "less than nothing," in comparison of it. The language of his heart is, "If I should hold my peace, the very stones would cry out against me." O that I had powers equal to the occasion! how would I praise him! how would I glorify him! verily I would praise him on earth, even as they do in heaven.]

In these purposes the believing soul is yet further confirmed by,

III. Its expectations—

The service of God is not without its reward even in this life: and hence the Believer, whilst engaged in his favourite employment, expects,

1. The richest consolation—

[The carnal mind can see no pleasure in this holy exercise; but the spiritual mind is refreshed by it, more than the most luxurious epicure ever was by the richest dainties. His very meditations are unspeakably sweet: yea, while contemplating his God upon his bed, and during the silent watches of the night, "his soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness:" it has a foretaste even of heaven itself — — — From its own experience of this heavenly joy, the soul expects this glorious harvest, when it has sown in tears, and laboured to glorify its God in songs of praise.]

2. The most assured safety—

[Thus engaged, the soul looks down upon all its enemies with disdain: it feels itself in an impregnable fortress: it is conscious that it owes all its past preservation to the help of its Almighty Friend; and it rejoices in the thought that under the shadow of the Redeemer's wings it must still be safe; and that "none shall ever pluck it out of the Father's hands." The state of Hezekiah, when surrounded by a vast army that was bent on his destruction, exactly shows what is the state of a believing soul in the midst of all its enemies: "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee." Such was the language of Zion to all the Assyrian hosts: and such is the blessed anticipation of victory which every Believer is privileged to enjoy^e.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. How greatly do the generality of religious professors live below their privileges!

[It was not peculiar to David thus to delight in God: it was then common, and is yet common, to all the saints. Can it be thought that we, who live under so much better a dispensation than he, and have so much brighter discoveries of God's power and glory than ever he had, should yet not be privileged to delight in God as he did? Were this the case, we should be losers by that religion which the Son of God came down from heaven to establish. But it is not so: we may partake of all spiritual blessings in as rich abundance as he, or any other of the saints of old, did. And we have reason to be ashamed that our desires after God are so faint, our purposes respecting him so weak, and our expectations from him so contracted. Let us, each for himself, look at our experience from day to day, and compare it with his; and let us not rest, till we have attained somewhat at least of that delight in God, which so eminently distinguished that blessed man.]

2. What encouragement have all to seek after God!

[It was not only after David had so grievously transgressed, but at the very moment that God was chastening him for his transgressions, that he was thus favoured of his God^f. Can we then with propriety say, This mercy is not for *me*? it is not possible for such a sinner as I ever to be thus highly favoured? Know ye, that there is no limit, either to the sovereign exercise of God's grace, or to its influence on the souls

^e Rom. viii. 33—39.

^f Absalom's incestuous commerce with David's wives was foretold by Nathan, as a part of David's punishment for his sin in taking to him the wife of his friend Uriah.

of men. His grace often most abounds, where sin has most abounded: and the vilest of us all may yet become the richest monument of God's love and mercy, if only, like David, he will humble himself for his iniquities, and sprinkle on his conscience the blood of our great sacrifice. O beloved! know, if you come to God by Christ, you shall never be cast out; and if you commit yourself in faith entirely to Christ, you shall rejoice in him with joy unspeakable, and receive in due time the great end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.]

DCI.

FOLLOWING AFTER GOD.

Ps. lxiii. 8. *My soul followeth hard after Thee: thy right hand upholdeth me.*

IT has been said, that Christian progress is more evinced by desires than by actual attainments. This sentiment is either true or false, according to the explanation given of it. If it be meant that there can be any growth in Christianity without attainments in holiness, or that growth in grace is to be measured by any thing but actual attainments in every part of the divine life, it is extremely erroneous: but if it be meant, that our views of a Christian's duty, and our desires after a perfect conformity to the divine will, will increase beyond our actual attainments, it is true: for a divinely enlightened soul has no bounds to its desires: but, alas! the good that it would, it does not; and the evil that it would not, that it does: so that, after all its exertions, it is constrained to say, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?" With this the Psalmist's experience was in strict accordance. He speaks in the beginning of this psalm, not as one who was in actual possession of all that he desired, but as one whose appetite for heavenly things was altogether insatiable: "O God, thou art my God: early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." So again, in the words of my text, he speaks, not as one who had attained, but as one pressing forward in

order to attain: "My soul followeth hard after thee." But was he discouraged as one that had failed in his endeavours? No: he regarded the desires which he felt, and the endeavours which he put forth, as evidences that God was with him of a truth; and as grounds of hope that he should ultimately attain all that his heart could wish.

We see, then, here,

I. The experience of a heaven-born soul.

Two things are found in every child of God:

1. He has desires which nothing but God himself can satisfy—

[The language of every enlightened soul is, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, O God? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee^a." He pants after peace and holiness; but how shall he obtain either the one or the other but from God himself? The world around him can contribute nothing, either to remove guilt from his conscience, or pollution from his soul. Nor can he himself do any thing for the effecting of these most desirable ends. If he look at his past or present life, he can find nothing whereon to found his hopes of acceptance with God: his very best duties are so defective, that they fill him only with shame and sorrow. Not one action of his life can he present to God as perfect, or as deserving a recompence in the eternal world: much less can he present any thing that shall, by its superabundant merit, purchase the forgiveness of former sins. Then, as it respects future obedience, he finds how frail his firmest resolutions are, and how weak his strongest efforts. It is in his Redeemer alone that he can find either righteousness or strength: and hence to him he looks, in order that he may obtain from him those blessings which his soul so greatly needs — — —]

2. He seeks after God for a supply of them—

["He follows hard after God." He follows after God in every way that God himself has appointed. He waits upon God in secret prayer, and implores help from him in sighs and groans and tears. He "wrestles with God," even as Jacob of old did; and will not let him go till he has conferred the desired blessing. In public ordinances, too, he waits, as at Bethesda's pool, for the stirring of the waters, and for the communication of the benefits he so greatly needs. Nor does he yield to discouragement because he does not presently

^a Ps. lxxiii. 25.

obtain all that he desires: he is content to "tarry the Lord's leisure," assured that he shall not be ultimately cast out, or suffered "to seek the Lord in vain."

The whole of this experience may be seen in another psalm, where David places in one view the greatness of his necessities, and the urgency of his requests: "I stretch forth my hands unto thee: my soul thirsteth after thee, as a thirsty land. Hear me speedily, O Lord: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me; lest I be like them that go down to the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee^b."]

That we may not think too unfavourably of this experience, let us notice,

II. The confidence which it is calculated to inspire—

The Psalmist, in the latter clause, did not merely intend to assert a fact, but to mark the connexion of that fact with the experience which he had just delineated; and which he regarded,

1. As an evidence of mercies received—

[He was conscious of ardent desires after God, and of laborious exertions in seeking after him. But whence was it that such desires had ever arisen in his mind? And how came they ever to be put forth into act? And whence had he derived that firmness of character, that he could persevere in his pursuit of God, under all the discouragements which he had to contend with? Were these the spontaneous product of his own heart? or were they infused into him by man? or did they arise out of any contingent circumstances capable of producing them? No: they sprang from God only, who had cast, as it were, the mantle of his love upon him, and drawn him to himself. It was "God who in the day of his power had made him willing" to renounce all his former pursuits, and to follow after Christ as the God of his salvation. God had "made him willing in the day of his power," and had kept him hitherto in his everlasting arms. Of all this, his experience was a decisive proof and evidence: and he could not but say, "He that hath wrought me to the self-same thing is God."]

2. As an earnest of yet further mercies in reserve—

[In this light God's mercies may with great propriety be viewed; and I doubt not but that this idea was intended to be expressed in the words before us. It is precisely what David more fully expressed in another psalm; where, having

^b Ps. cxliii. 6—8.

said to God, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death," he adds, "Wilt thou not keep mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living^c?" This was a legitimate inference from the premises which he had stated: and St. Paul drew the same inference with a yet stronger measure of confidence and assurance; saying to his Philippian converts, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ^d." St. Paul, in particular saw that there was an inseparable connexion between grace and glory: for that "whom God did predestinate in eternity, them he also called in time; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified^e." And a sweet truth it is, that "He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people^f;" and that "whom he loveth, he loveth unto the end^g."]

ADDRESS—

1. The lukewarm Christian—

[Having spoken favourably of good *desires*, I must guard with all possible care against a misapprehension of my meaning. It is said in Scripture, "The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour^h." This is a very awful truth: for there are many who rest satisfied with languid desires, instead of labouring for the things desired. Against such a state our blessed Lord very strongly cautions us, when he says, "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate; for many will *seek* to enter in, and shall not be ableⁱ." "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence: and the violent must take it by force^k." And, whatever be your sentiments about the unchangeableness of God's love, you may be perfectly sure that you are not walking acceptably with him, unless you can say with truth, "My soul followeth hard after God."]

2. The earnest and zealous Christian—

[Whatever attainments you make in the divine life, never forget to whom they must all be ascribed. A ball would as soon return of itself to the cannon's mouth, from whence it had been shot forth, as you of yourself would ever have returned unto God. And a new-born infant would as soon provide for all its own wants, as you would have preserved yourself, by any power of your own, in the ways of God. It is God who in the first instance quickened you from the dead, and "gave you both to will and to do" what was pleasing in his sight.

^c Ps. lvi. 13.

^f 1 Sam. xii. 22.

ⁱ Luke xiii. 24.

^d Phil. i. 6.

^g John xiii. 1.

^k Matt. xi. 12.

^e Rom. viii. 29, 30.

^h Prov. xxi. 25.

Give him, then, the glory of all that your either are or have; and live dependent on him even to the end; for it is he, and he alone, who can uphold you: and as “he is able to keep you from falling, so he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy¹.”]

¹ Jude, ver. 24.

DCII.

CONSOLATION IN GOD.

Ps. lxxv. 3. *Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.*

FROM reading the experience of the saints, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, we derive not only comfort and encouragement, but the most refined instruction that can be conveyed to the mind of man. As in light there is a combination of widely different rays, and it is that combination, together with their simultaneous action, which gives to light its peculiar sweetness; so it is a combination of widely different views and feelings that gives to the Christian his divinely-tempered experience in the things of God. In the passage before us, we behold the man after God's own heart bewailing his sinfulness, yet not discouraged; and sweetly comforted in his soul, without any abatement of his contrition. It is this mixture of feeling which so greatly elevates the Christian character. His graces, by means of it, shine with a subdued lustre; and being thus tempered, they are “pleasing to the eyes both of God and man^a.” Let us notice,

I. His complaint—

What are we to understand by this expression, “Iniquities prevail against me?”

[It cannot be meant that he *indulged in* sin of any kind; for “one who is born of God doth not *commit* sin; nor indeed can he commit sin (willingly and habitually), because he is born of God.” “Whoso committeth sin in this way, is of the devil^b.” Indeed the very terms here used suppose a conflict. David hated and resisted sin in the daily habit of his mind:

^a Eccl. xi. 7.

^b 1 John iii. 8, 9.

but he had within him a principle of evil as well as of good; “the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, so that he could not do the things that he would^c.” He was in the same predicament with the Apostle Paul; who, though he delighted in the Law of God after the inward man, “found a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin which was in his members.” And under a painful sense of his infirmities he cried, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death,” which I am constrained thus to drag along with me, as a putrid carcase, even to my dying hour^d? We understand, therefore, David as saying precisely what St. Paul also says: “To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not: for the good that I would, I do not; and the evil which I would not, that I do^e.”]

And who is there amongst us that has not reason to adopt this language in reference to his own soul?

[If we look at the *workings of actual corruption*, we shall all find occasion to confess, “Iniquities prevail against me.” All, it is true, are not guilty of gross sin: but who is free from indwelling corruption? “Who can say, I have made my heart clean^f?” There is an abundance both of “spiritual and fleshly filthiness” in every child of man^g: the most eminent saint on earth is renewed but in part^h: it is in heaven alone that absolute perfection exists. He can know but little of himself who does not see occasion to mourn over many evil thoughts, and many corrupt propensities. Not to mention those which pertain to man in common with the beast, let us take a view of the workings of our hearts in relation to pride, envy, malice, and revenge: let us call to mind the motions of anger, fretfulness, impatience, of which our consciences must convict us: let us trace the influence of uncharitableness towards those who stand in competition with us, or have made themselves in any way obnoxious to our displeasure. We may soon discover how far any of us are from being perfect, and what need we all have to cry, “Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord; for in thy sight shall no man living be justifiedⁱ.”

But let us look at *our short-comings and defects*, and then we shall find no difficulty in adopting the complaint of David in our text. The true way to discover our real state before God,

^c Gal. v. 17.

^d Rom. vii. 22—24. Alluding to a punishment which some tyrants have inflicted on the objects of their displeasure.

^e Rom. vii. 18, 19.

^f Prov. xx. 9.

^g 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^h 1 Cor. xiii. 9, 10.

ⁱ Ps. cxliii. 2.

is to take his holy Law as the standard whereby to try our habits and attainments. How far are any of us from loving God with *all* our heart, and *all* our mind, and *all* our soul, and *all* our strength; and our neighbour *as ourselves*! Only let us notice the frame of our souls through the day, yea even in the exercises of devotion, and we shall have no need for any one to tell us how far we are still alienated from God, and how little we have attained of habitual communion with him. And though we may, on the whole, be kind towards our neighbour, let us only be brought by any circumstances into actual collision with him, and we shall discover to others at least, if not discern in ourselves, how very far short of the divine standard our love to him is, and how unlike we are to Christ, who “laid down his life for his enemies.” Let us go on to examine the state of our souls in reference to our blessed Lord and Saviour, who died for us. What admiring and adoring thoughts of him should we entertain from day to day, from hour to hour! What floods of tears should run down our cheeks from a sense of love and gratitude to him for all the wonders of his love; and what an influence should they produce on the whole of our life and conversation.

I need go no further to confirm the truth which I am inculcating, namely, that “iniquities do indeed prevail against us” to a fearful extent; and that all of us have need to “walk softly before God” in the remembrance of them^k.]

But, if we partake of David’s sorrows, we may also be partakers of,

II. His consolation—

As the Apostle, after his lamentation, found comfort in Christ, so David also found consolation *in God through Christ*. He derives comfort,

1. From the free grace and mercy of God—

[It is evident that he regards God as a gracious and merciful Being, who would “not be extreme to mark what was done amiss^l,” but would in judgment remember mercy. And this ground of hope is open to us all: for mercy is the darling attribute of the Deity, if I may so speak, the attribute “in which he delights^m,” whilst judgment is that strange work to which he is utterly averseⁿ. See the description which Jehovah gives of his own character: “I am the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity,

^k Isai. xxxviii. 15.

^m Mic. vii. 18.

^l Ps. cxxx. 3.

ⁿ Isai. xxviii. 21.

transgression, and sin^o." See also his marvellous displays of this attribute towards the children of men: to what an extent it could reach^p, and with what rapidity it could fly to the discharge of its delightful office^q. Hear the language in which God "*reasons*" with sinners: (O, blessed *reasoning*! I pray God it may convince us all, and not leave so much as a shadow of doubt upon our minds!) "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^r." Yes, Brethren, however discouraging your inward conflicts may be, ye may well "encourage yourselves in the Lord your God^s."]

2. From the sufficiency of the means ordained by God—

[God had appointed sacrifices as an atonement for sin: and, though "they could never take away sin," or "make a man perfect as pertaining to the conscience^t," they directed the offerers to that one great sacrifice which was in due time to be offered on the cross, and which was a sufficient "propitiation for the sins of the whole world^u." And, in the view of that sacrifice, David, with all his enormous guilt upon him, could say, "Purge *me* with hyssop, and *I* shall be clean; wash me, and *I* shall be whiter than snow^x." Who then amongst us shall despair of mercy, if only we seek it in the Saviour's name? Indeed it is not mercy only, but justice also, that shall plead for us, if we approach our God in the name of Christ: for we are told that "if we confess our sins, God is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness^y." Here, then, let the drooping sinner take courage; and to his complaints, that "iniquities prevail against him," add the consolatory truth, "As for my transgressions, O Lord, thou shalt purge them away." Thou hast "opened a fountain for sin and for uncleanness^z;" and I believe that it shall be sufficient even for *me*; and that "the blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, shall cleanse me from all sin^a."]

To all of you, then, I would SAY,

1. Acquaint yourselves with your own ways, that you may be truly humbled—

[There can be no humility without self-knowledge: nor must any one be satisfied with an examination of his outward conduct: (*that*, like St. Paul's in his unconverted state, may

^o Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. ^p 2 Chron. xxxiii. 19.

^q 2 Sam. xii. 13.

^r Isai. i. 18.

^s 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

^t Heb. ix. 9, 14. and x. 4, 14.

^u 1 John ii. 2.

^x Ps. li. 7.

^y 1 John i. 9.

^z Zech. xiii. 1.

^a 1 John i. 7.

be “blameless^b”). We must search our *hearts*, if we would know ourselves aright; yea, and “beg of God also to search and try us,” if we would attain that kind of self-knowledge which alone will be sufficient to humble our proud spirits^c. Mark, then, I pray you, your thoughts, your desires, your motives, your principles, and the entire *habit of your minds* before God. Mark all your tempers under the various circumstances that arise from day to day: and compare yourselves with the requirements of the Law, and with that great exemplar, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do this, and you will find no temptation to pride yourselves on your attainments, or to exalt yourselves above your less favoured brethren. You will find your place, where the Apostle found his, amongst the chief of sinners, and will vie with him in magnifying and adoring the grace of God — —]

2. “Acquaint yourselves with God, that you may be at peace” —

[This was the advice which Eliphaz gave to Job^d, and which I would give to every one of you. It is *self-knowledge* which alone can humble us: but it is *the knowledge of God* alone that can afford us any comfort. Indeed, the more we know of our indwelling corruptions, the more shall we despair, if we do not proportionably grow in the knowledge of God and of his Son Jesus Christ. But if we bear in mind what we have already stated respecting the character of God, and the sufficiency of that sacrifice which Christ has offered for us, we shall attain that precise frame of mind, that just admixture of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, of confidence and abasement, which constitutes the perfection of Christian experience, and leads to the highest possible attainments in the divine life. Go then, every one of you, my Brethren, to God in Christ Jesus. Carry nothing with you but your sins. Think not of purging them away by any thing that you yourselves can do; but cast yourselves upon the mercy of God in Christ Jesus; and expect from him the mercy which you need for the pardon of your sins, and the grace which you need for the maintenance of your future conflicts. Only go with Paul, crying, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me?” and you shall be enabled to add with him, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord^e.”]

^b Phil. iii. 6.

^c Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

^d Job xxii. 21.

^e Rom. vii. 25.

DCIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF WAITING UPON GOD.

Ps. lxxv. 4. *Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.*

THE connexion between duty and happiness, though not seen by the generality of men, is certain. It may not presently appear: but it will approve itself, at last, to all who will wait for the issue of passing events. To the ungodly man it seems a drudgery to wait upon God: but to every humble and believing suppliant it will be found a source of unbounded bliss; so at least the Psalmist affirms in the words before us; from which we shall take occasion to notice,

I. The habit of God's chosen people—

It is the delight of every true Christian to approach unto his God—

[He feels, like the Psalmist, that “iniquity has prevailed against him” to a very fearful extent: but he sees that an all-sufficient atonement has been offered for him; and that, through the blood of Christ once shed on Calvary, “every transgression that he has ever committed may be purged away^a.” Hence he approaches God with all humility as a sinner, and with all earnestness, as one that desires mercy at his hands — — — Nor is it on some particular occasions only that his people draw nigh to him. They resemble the priests of old, whose apartments were in the temple, round about the sanctuary; and who therefore “dwelt in his courts:” for, in the habit of their minds at least, “they dwell in God” by meditation and prayer; and “God dwells in them” by the abiding influence of his Spirit and grace — — —]

And to this is he brought by the mighty working of the power of God—

[It is not by any natural power that the saints draw nigh unto God. Of themselves, they would flee from God, even as our first parents did in Paradise. It is “God himself who draws them^b,” and who from all eternity “chose them” to this high honour. They are unto the Lord “an holy priesthood^c,”

^a ver. 3.^b John vi. 44.^c 1 Pet. ii. 9.

and what God said to Eli may, in a spiritual sense, be applied to them; “Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt, in Pharaoh’s house? and did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel? Yes, I did^d,” and in like manner has God chosen from eternity, and “set apart for himself” in time, all those who by “a spirit of grace and of supplication” approach unto him^e. Hence it is, and hence alone, that they are “a people near unto him^f.”]

And it is not without reason that David declares,
II. Their blessedness resulting from it.

The terms in which he states this, convey the idea most richly to our minds—

[The priests, whilst serving at the altar, “partook of the altar,” and “lived of the altar.” See the particular account, as stated by Moses. “The Lord spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave-offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them, by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat-offering of theirs, and every sin-offering of theirs, and every trespass-offering of theirs, which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee, and for thy sons. In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee. And this is thine: the heave-offering of their gift, with all the wave-offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons, and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever; every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. *All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the first-fruits of them, which they shall offer unto the Lord, them have I given thee. And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the Lord, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it. Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine^g.*” Let this be noticed; and it will be seen that the priests of old were richly provided for, and well sustained by the fatness of God’s house.]

And here we see indeed the blessedness of waiting upon God—

[God’s people, now, are “priests unto their God^h.” And

^d 1 Sam. ii. 27, 28.

^e Ps. iv. 3. Zech. xii. 10.

^f Ps. cxlviii. 14.

^g Numb. xviii. 8—14.

^h Rev. i. 6.

this is the sustenance which, in a spiritual sense, is provided for them. *Mark the wonderful correspondence between the Prophet Jeremiah, when describing the times of the Gospel, and Moses, in the fore-cited passage, declaring the ordinances of the Law: "They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden, and they shall not sorrow any more at all And I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness; and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the Lordⁱ."* Who does not see in this the accomplishment of my text? *In communion with God*, the souls of men are filled as with marrow and fatness, whilst their mouth praiseth him with joyful lips^k. "*And in the communications which they receive from him, they are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house; and he makes them to drink of the river of his pleasures^l."* In truth, no tongue can declare, no imagination can conceive, the full extent of those benefits which men obtain by waiting upon God: for "the riches that they obtain are unsearchable;" their "peace passeth all understanding;" and their "joy is unspeakable and glorified."

SEE, then, I pray you, Brethren,

1. How different is the issue of men's different pursuits!—

[Is the worldling ever thus replenished to satiety? Never. He grasps a shadow; and "in the midst of his sufficiency he is in straits^m" — — — But the true Christian finds in his God all that his soul can desire: and "drinking of the water that Christ gives him, he never thirsts again" for any thing that this vain world can affordⁿ — — —]

2. What a preparation for heaven is the Christian's employment upon earth!

[It is the delight of the Christian to draw nigh to God, and to offer to him the sacrifices of prayer and praise. And what, I pray you, are they doing in heaven? The only difference is, that here they pour forth their prayers under the influence of hope; but there, their one sacrifice is praise, called forth without ceasing, under a sense of complete, uninterrupted fruition.

Let, then, every soul amongst you adopt the habit of holy David: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple^o."

ⁱ Jer. xxxi. 12, 14.

^k Ps. lxxiii. 5.

^l Ps. xxxvi. 7, 8.

^m Job xx. 22.

ⁿ John iv. 14.

^o Ps. xxvii. 4.

DCIV.

GOD'S WORKS OF PROVIDENCE AND GRACE.

Ps. lxv. 9—13. *Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness: they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks: the valleys also are covered over with corn: they shout for joy; they also sing.*

ON what occasion this psalm was written is not certainly known: but it is probable that the inspired penman wrote it on the removal of the famine which God sent to punish the cruelty of Saul and of his bloody house towards the Gibeonites, whom he was bound by covenant to protect. This famine lasted three years: but at last, David having inquired of the Lord on what account this heavy judgment had been sent, and how the removal of it might be obtained, he was informed, that it was sent as a punishment of Saul's treachery, in which the people, no doubt, had too willingly concurred; and that he must execute on Saul's posterity such a judgment as the Gibeonites themselves should award to them. The Gibeonites demanded that seven of Saul's sons should be put to death. Seven of his sons were accordingly delivered into their hands, and were hanged up by them, as an atonement for their father's sin^a. The Gibeonites being now satisfied with this act of retributive justice, the favour of God was restored to the land, and the whole nation was gladdened with the return of plenty. Under this great calamity, David and all the pious of the land had humbled themselves before God; and in this psalm they acknowledge God as the merciful Answerer of prayer to his penitent people, whilst he was the just Punisher of sin to those who continued impenitent. "He had lately

^a 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9.

answered them by terrible things in righteousness" for their transgressions: and now he had mercifully "heard their prayer," and "purged away their transgressions."

The words before us give a lively and beautiful description of the change wrought upon the earth through the rich showers with which God, in his mercy, had watered it. Of course our attention therefore must, in the first place, be fixed on those blessings of providence with which we also are favoured: yet, as throughout all the inspired writings there will be found a reference to spiritual blessings, under those terms which at first sight appear to have only a literal and carnal import, it will be proper to notice, also, what we conceive to be mystically contained in this passage. Agreeably to this view, we shall consider the text,

I. As literally fulfilled in the blessings of God's Providence—

God is, in reality, "the giver of every good and perfect gift"—

[Because God, in the first creation of the world, assigned to every thing its proper place and office, we are apt to overlook his agency in the things of daily occurrence, and to ascribe them to what are called *the laws of nature*. But the hand of God is as necessary to uphold the universe, as ever it was to create it at first. The heavenly bodies, it is true, have had their motions given them from the beginning; and have, for the most part, continued to obey the laws of their creation. But they have occasionally had those laws suspended; as when the sun stood still upon Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, for the space of a whole day: and from hence it appears, that they move in subserviency to the will of their Creator, and execute his righteous purposes of vengeance or of love, according to his command. The same may be said respecting the elements of this terraqueous globe. Fire and water have their properties; according to which, for the most part, they act: but at God's command the waters stood like a wall, to form a passage and a rampart for his chosen people; and the fire lost its power even to singe the clothes of his faithful servants, who were cast into it for their fidelity to him. In like manner, the earth produces fruits of different kinds; and the rains at certain seasons descend to call forth into activity its vegetative powers. But the agency both of the

heavens and the earth depends altogether upon God, who, when he sees fit, “makes the heavens as brass,” and the earth as iron. In a climate like ours, where the rains are frequent and occasional, God’s agency is but little seen: but in countries where the rains are periodical, the want of them is so severely felt, that the goodness of God in sending them is more sensibly perceived, and more readily acknowledged. But in one place as well as in another, the influences both of heaven and earth are alike dependent upon him, and must be referred to Him as their true, and only, and continual source.]

His bounty and goodness should be gratefully acknowledged by us at this time—

[Extremely beautiful is the description here given of the progress of vegetation, in consequence of a seasonable supply of rain^b — — — To attempt an illustration of these words would weaken their force, and reduce their sublimity. But, if a poetical taste alone can qualify us to appreciate their beauty, and to enter into them with a becoming zest, a spiritual taste also is necessary, to lead us to a due improvement of them, and to enable us to realize their full import. However, whether gifted with a poetical imagination or not, let me entreat all to survey the face of the earth; to see the change that has been wrought on every thing around him: methinks, without any poetic fancy, he may see the smiles of universal nature, and hear the songs and shoutings of a grateful world. And let our hearts respond to the voice of nature, and ascend up in praises and thanksgivings to our bounteous God.]

But let us further view the text,

II. As emblematically describing the yet richer blessings of his grace—

Besides the primary sense of Scripture, there is frequently a secondary and subordinate meaning, which ought not to be overlooked. In relation to this matter, the New Testament affords us the fullest information, in that it cites many passages in which we should have had no conception of any thing beyond the literal meaning, if a further sense had not been unfolded to us by Him whose wisdom cannot err, and whose authority cannot be questioned. The whole 104th Psalm, in appearance, relates to the works of creation and providence; but towards the close of it we are led, though but cursorily and obscurely, to the contemplation of God’s spiritual

^b Here repeat the text.

government; in which view, the psalm is appointed by our Church to be read on the day whereon the out-pouring of the Spirit is more especially commemorated. The psalm before us may with equal propriety be viewed in the same light; and the rather, because the images used in our text are frequently applied to that very subject, to represent the influence of God's Spirit on the soul; "His doctrine dropping as the rain, and distilling as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass^c."

Let us notice, then, the influence of the Gospel,

1. Upon the world at large—

[Verily, the whole world is one great wilderness; some few spots only giving any just evidence of cultivation. It is not above one-sixth part of mankind that has even so much as heard of the name of Jesus: and where his Gospel is not preached, sin reigns without control: even religion itself is nothing but a blind and bloody superstition, involving its votaries in every thing that is cruel and detestable. But see where the Gospel has gained an ascendant: look at Britain, for instance, and compare its state at this time with its state previous to the introduction of Christianity: once it was a dreary desert; but now it blossoms as the rose, and is as the garden of Eden. True it is that the *name* of Christianity effects but little: it civilizes, indeed, and raises the standard of morals; but it produces nothing corresponding with the description before us. But when "the word comes, not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance," then a great and mighty change is effected: "the Spirit being poured out from on high, the wilderness becomes a fruitful field; and the fruitful field is so abundant, that it is even counted for a forest^d." Could we but inspect the various settlements where zealous ministers have established churches amongst the savages of different climes, and see the difference between them and their yet uninstructed countrymen, we should have a far juster notion of the power of the Gospel than we can acquire in the midst of civilized society, where little remains to be added to the external deportment, and where the change effected by the Gospel is chiefly of a spiritual and internal nature. But the whole subject will be more fully open to us, if we view the Gospel as operating—]

2. Upon the souls of individual believers—

^c Deut. xxxii. 2.

^d Isai. xxxii. 15.

[What were any of us in our unconverted state, but, like a barren heath, bringing forth briars and thorns, without any of those fruits of righteousness in which God delights? As for humiliation before God, and a simple life of faith in the Lord Jesus, and a delight in spiritual exercises, and an entire devotedness of soul to God, we were as much strangers to it all as the heathen themselves. But, when the word of the Gospel came with power to our souls, it wrought a change upon our whole man, and made us altogether new creatures: "Old things passed away; and, behold, all things became new." The obdurate surface of our hearts was softened; and the unproductive soil put forth a vital energy; by means of which all the fruits of the Spirit sprang up in rich abundance, and gave a hopeful prospect of a luxuriant harvest. Would we see this realized in a way that cannot be misunderstood, let us look at the converts on the day of Pentecost. It is not possible to conceive persons more destitute of all good, or more filled with every hateful quality, than were the crucifiers and murderers of the Lord of Glory: yet in one hour how changed! so that they remain to this day the most exalted patterns of piety to the whole world. Thus it is at this day, also, amongst ourselves: the work, indeed, is not so sudden, nor so general; but, where the grace of the Gospel is received in truth, it operates precisely in the same way: "instead of the brier, there grows up the fir-tree; and instead of the thorn, there grows up the myrtle-tree; and even the tenderest plants rise in stately magnificence into "trees of righteousness, whereby the Lord is glorified."]

APPLICATION—

Let me now call you,

1. To adore your God for the blessings you have already received—

[I would not that you should overlook the blessings of Providence. Even in this country we have often known the sad effects of scarcity: and we may well, therefore, bless our God for the prospects of abundance. To every one of you I would say, with David, "Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God; who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains. He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry^e."

And will you not much more adore him for the blessings of his grace? Surely, if you do not, the very stones will cry out against you——Yet rest not in mere acknowledgments, however grateful they may be: but seek to abound in fruits of

^e Ps. cxlvii. 7—9.

righteousness: which, whilst they are the necessary evidences of his work upon your souls, are the only effectual means of bringing honour to his name.]

2. To look to him continually for fresh and more abundant communications—

[The fertilizing showers which we have received will be of little avail, if they be not renewed from time to time: and all the grace that any of us have received, will be ineffectual for any permanent good, if we be not favoured with fresh “supplies of the Holy Spirit” from day to day. The grace which has been imparted to our souls this day, will no more suffice for our spiritual wants to-morrow, than will the light which has been communicated to our bodies. We must receive out of Christ’s fulness from day to day, as the branch of the vine receives from its stem and root. Let your daily prayer, then, be like that of David: “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is^f.” In reading the word, and in the public ordinances, look up for the blessing of God upon your soul; and plead with him that gracious promise, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses^g.” Yes, Beloved, look unto God with increasing earnestness and confidence; and he will pour out upon you “showers of blessings;” and you shall be “beauteous as the olive, and fruitful as the vine, and fragrant as the woods of Lebanon^h.”]

^f Ps. lxiii. 1.

^g Isai. xlv. 3, 4.

^h Hos. xiv. 4—7.

DCV.

STABILITY THE GIFT OF GOD.

Ps. lxvi. 8, 9. *O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard; which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.*

THE blessings of Providence, when uninterruptedly continued, are scarcely noticed: it is only when the loss of them has been painfully apprehended, or actually sustained, that we consider how much we were indebted to God for them. What were the particular trials that had been endured by David or the Jewish nation, we cannot precisely

determine: but it is evident, that the deliverance vouchsafed to them had made a lively impression on the Psalmist's mind^a. The words of our text would furnish exceedingly profitable meditations, if we confined them to their primary import; since the preservation of our life and health, amidst the many seen and unseen dangers with which we are surrounded, demands our most grateful acknowledgments. But a subsequent part of the psalm shews clearly that the writer had respect also to spiritual blessings^b; and therefore we shall draw your attention more especially to them; and shew,

I. What a mercy it is to be upheld in the ways of God—

We feel somewhat of the obligation conferred upon us in our first awakening and conversion; but are by no means duly sensible how much we owe to our God for our daily preservation. But we shall learn better to appreciate this mercy if we consider,

1. To how many snares and dangers we are exposed!

[We have frequent occasion to advert to the temptations with which we are encompassed in the world; and to notice the still greater dangers we experience from the corruptions of our own hearts; and the additional conflicts which we have to sustain with all the powers of darkness. We dwell not therefore so particularly on those things at this time: but rather mention the danger to which we are exposed, even from lawful things. It is not only allowable, but highly proper, to prosecute our worldly callings with diligence; and to cultivate the tenderest regard for our wife or children: yet both the one and the other may engross too much of our hearts, and become hindrances to us in our journey towards heaven. Our food, our sleep, our studies, our recreations, may become snares, if we be not continually on our guard. It is therefore an unspeakable mercy to be upheld in the midst of such manifold temptations.]

2. How many, in like circumstances with ourselves, have fallen—

[We are living in the full enjoyment of divine ordinances, and of whatever can conduce to the welfare of our souls. But are we therefore secure? Look back to the apostolic age: see

^a Compare ver. 1, 2. with ver. 10—12.

^b ver. 16.

how many then were seduced by error^c—or disheartened by the fear of man^d—or turned aside by the love of the world^e—or overthrown by unbridled passions^f. What reason then have we to adore the grace that has preserved *us*!]

3. What would be the probable consequence of our falling—

[Some who have fallen have been restored speedily^g; and some after a lapse of time^h: but thousands have fallen to rise no more. The progress of declension is for the most part rapid. The heart becomes averse to holy duties: from secret neglects proceeds a backwardness to social conference and public ordinances. The conscience is gradually weakened, till it ceases to perform its office, or speaks in so faint a voice, that it is scarcely heard. The besetting sin then gains an entire ascendant, and leads him captive; till at last, God, filled with indignation against the base apostate, “gives him up to a reprobate mindⁱ,” and either cuts him off by a sudden stroke^k, or leaves him to protract a miserable existence, merely that he may bear testimony against his own impieties, and proclaim to those around him the foretastes which he already feels of his eternal destiny^l.

Such examples we have seen^m: what a mercy it is that we ourselves, instead of being warned by others, are not made a warning to others!]

4. What occasion we have given to God to let us fall—

[Let us call to mind our own backslidings; our secret neglects; our tamperings with temptations; our indulgence of evil passions; our vain-confident presumption: is it not wonderful that God has not long since said respecting us, “Let him aloneⁿ:” “My Spirit shall strive with him no longer^o:” “He likes not to retain God in his knowledge; so I will give him up^p?”]

If we be convinced of these things, let us proceed to consider,

II. The duty of those who experience this mercy—

^c Tit. i. 11. 2 Tim. ii. 18.

^d 2 Tim. i. 15. and iv. 16. Matt. xxvi. 73, 74.

^e Matt. xiii. 22. 2 Tim. iv. 10. ^f 1 Tim. v. 11, 12. 2 Sam. xi. 4.

^g John xxi. 15—17.

^h 2 Sam. xii. 13.

ⁱ Ps. lxxxix. 11, 12.

^k Prov. xxix. 1. Acts v. 5, 10.

^l Eccl. v. 17. with Prov. xiv. 32.

^m This was preached on occasion of a person that had made a profession of religion, going back to drunkenness, and dying in a drunken fit. See other examples, 1 Cor. x. 6—11.

ⁿ Hos. iv. 17.

^o Gen. vi. 3.

^p Rom. i. 28.

There can be no doubt on this subject. If our souls have been upheld in life, we should,

1. Acknowledge God in our steadfastness—

[“Who is it that has made us to differ” from others?^q Have we by nature any more strength than they? or have we of ourselves a more abundant measure of goodness? No: it is “by the grace of God we are what we are^r :” we have been as much indebted to his protecting hand, as a new-born infant is to its mother’s care. We should then acknowledge, that “of him our fruit is found^s ;” that “it is he who hath wrought us to the self-same thing^t ;” and that to him belongs all the glory of our stability^u .]

2. Bless and adore him for his great goodness—

[It is not by cold acknowledgments merely that we are to requite the Lord, but by fervent and devout thanksgivings. It is not possible for language adequately to express the obligations we owe to him: and therefore we should call upon “all that is within us to bless his holy name.”

Nor should we be content with doing this ourselves: we should invite the whole creation, as it were, to join us. We should labour to stimulate all to love and serve him; and to make his name known to the very ends of the earth^x .

It is in this way that we should endeavour at least, as much as in us lies, to “render unto the Lord according to the benefits” he has conferred upon us.]

3. Walk humbly and carefully before him—

[We must not presume upon the kindness of our God, or imagine, that, because we have been upheld hitherto, we are in no danger of falling: if we had attained the stability of St. Paul himself, “we must keep our body under, and bring it into subjection, lest we become cast-aways ourselves^y .” To neglect this, were to tempt God. God has warned us plainly, that “he will be with us no longer than we continue with him; but that if we forsake him, he will forsake us^z .” We therefore must not be high-minded, but fear^a ; and take heed lest we fall^b ; and “watch and pray, that we enter not into temptation^c .” If we would have our God to keep us, we must be careful to “keep ourselves^d .” We must look at the fearful examples that are before

^q 1 Cor. iv. 7. ^r 1 Cor. xv. 10. ^s Hos. xiv. 8. Isai. xxvi. 12.

^t 2 Cor. v. 5. ^u Ps. lxii. 8. and xxvi. 12.

^x Isai. xii. 4—6. or xlii. 10—12. See also the *text*.

^y 1 Cor. ix. 27.

^z 2 Chron. xv. 2.

^a 1 Cor. x. 12.

^b Rom. xi. 20.

^c Matt. xxvi. 41.

^d ver. 18. with Jude, ver. 20, 21.

our eyes^e, and tremble lest we ourselves become similar monuments of instability, and of God's deserved wrath.]

4. Commit ourselves continually to him—

[God has engaged to “keep the feet of his saints^f,” and directed us to commit ourselves to him for that purpose^g; and assured us, that, if we do so, “he will establish our goings^h.” We should commend ourselves therefore to his gracious care and protection. We should say with David, “Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip notⁱ.” “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe^k.” To this we are encouraged by our past experience of his mercy: we may from the kindness already shewn us, safely infer the continuance of it to our souls^l. If we can say, “He hath delivered,” we may properly add, “In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us^m.”]

But here arise two important QUESTIONS, which it is of the utmost importance to resolve—

1. Are our souls really alive to God?

[In vain shall we speak of having “our souls upheld in life,” if they have never yet been quickened from the dead. Let us then seriously, and as in the presence of God, inquire, Whether we have been made partakers of a new and living principle, whereby we have been enabled to die unto sin, and to live unto God? Let us not mistake a mere approbation of religion for real regeneration: we must have become new creatures, having new views, new desires, new pursuits, and new prospects, if we have been truly born againⁿ: and if this change have not been wrought within us, we are yet in our natural and unconverted state; we may have “a name to live, but are really dead” before God: notwithstanding we may have been preserved from any flagrant violation of our duty, we are yet “dead in trespasses and sins.”]

2. Supposing that we are on the whole alive to God, have “our feet really been kept from falling?”

[We must ascertain this fact, before we can cordially thank God for it. And is it indeed true of all who profess religion amongst us, that they have been kept? Have none of us acted unworthy of our high calling? Has there been nothing in our tempers, nothing in our worldly transactions, inconsistent with our profession? Or, supposing our outward conduct to have been unimpeachable, have there been no secret sins,

^e Luke xvii. 32. Heb. iv. 11.

^g 1 Pet. iv. 19.

^h 2 Chron. xx. 20.

^f 1 Sam. ii. 9.

^k Ps. cxix. 117.

ⁱ Ps. lvi. 13.

^j Ps. xvii. 5.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 17.

^m 2 Cor. i. 10.

which we have chosen to insert upon nothing but what we judge is true and is confirmed by the facts. Perhaps if we had known we didn't feel sure enough to insert our facts, that is, however true for being true, is not telling.

But I sometimes wish that we had inserted what we ought rather than that we had inserted the matter as it was, and not only that, but we might have inserted "but whatever else it is, it is the word of the prophets to Israel" throughout the work.

[1891]

LETTERS TO THE NEW YORK CORRESPONDENT.

NEW YORK, N. Y. Dear mother, all ye that fear God, and that desire to be faithful for my sake.

ANY person of independent mind should have observed an anomaly, or anomaly, in a very kind manner, would not begin to communicate information respecting it, whenever such knowledge was required? I think your pen would seem to him to be somewhat, or most careful to him the right of presenting to himself the advantage in which his superior knowledge has obtained him: but when the very act of communicating information will equally, rather than improve it, the instructor, and be himself will be made a gain by imparting, he would be highly careful if he withheld from the world the blessing he was enabled to confer. This is especially the case in things pertaining to the soul: and hence we may expect to find all who have been taught of God, ready and willing to impart to others the benefits they have received. The early Apostles, Andrew and Philip, no sooner found the Messiah, than they sought to bring their brethren, Peter and Nathanael, to an acquaintance with him.* And the Apostles further saw no sooner confirmed herself of the Messiahship of Jesus, than the next is ready of the men of her city to come and see the person, whom she believed to be the Christ. Thus it was

* This has been done in reference to the Messiah by the apostles in verse.

* John 1:41, 42.

* John 1:43, 44.

with David: he communed much with God: he learned much from God: he was favoured with the richest communications which God himself could bestow. But he would not keep these things to himself: he hoped, by a free communication with pious characters, to bring them to a participation of all that he himself enjoyed: and therefore, filled with divine philanthropy, he sent out, as it were, this general invitation, "Come and hear, all ye that fear God: and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."

In discoursing on these words, we will shew,

I. What God had done for his soul—

David, as we are told in the foregoing context, had been involved in many troubles, from which nothing but a Divine interposition could have delivered him¹. But we must not confine the subject to *temporal* deliverances: he speaks of something which God had done for "his soul;" and more particularly specifies, that God "had not turned away his mercy from him;" and makes *that* the peculiar ground of his praise and thanksgiving. We observe then that God had vouchsafed to him,

1. The pardon of his sins—

[This would have been an exceedingly rich mercy, even if David had never fallen from his former integrity. But, if we view the great enormities committed by him in the matter of Uriah, we see good reason why he should magnify God's mercy beyond any other of the sins of men. Whether this poison was written prior, or subsequent to his fall, we know not; and therefore we forbear to notice that as an aggravation of his guilt, or as enhancing the mercy vouchsafed to him. As a man, he was a sinner from his mother's womb; and the most perfect of men could no more stand than the vilest, if God should enter into judgment with him, and mark in him all that had been done amiss. David was sensible of this, and acknowledged it in these expressive terms; "I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore! for great is thy mercy towards me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell!" Let us be sensible, how much we also stand in need of mercy; and let us seek it as that without which our souls must for ever perish* or, if we

¹ 1 Sam. 17—19.

² 1 Sam. 26.

³ Ps. 138:1 (12:1).

have received mercy, let us devoutly glorify our God for it as a benefit which no words can ever adequately express.]

2. A manifestation of that pardon to his soul—

[David had prayed earnestly to God, and had obtained an answer to his prayer. How this answer was conveyed to his mind, we are not informed: but he had no doubt in his own soul respecting it: he could say, “Verily God hath heard me; he hath attended to the voice of my prayer^g.” O! who can estimate aright *this* mercy? See how the prophet Jeremiah speaks of it: “I called upon thy name, O Lord, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry. Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not^h.” How tender! how pathetic! how encouraging this acknowledgment! Such was David’s also, on another occasion: “I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troublesⁱ.” Truly this is a great and blessed work which “the Lord does for the souls” of men: and it was with good reason that David said, “Come and hear, all ye that fear God; and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”]

But it will be proper to state more particularly,

II. Why he was so ready to speak of it—

It was not from ostentation or vanity that he thus called the attention of others to his own concerns, but,

1. From a sense of gratitude to God—

[Such mercies call for the liveliest gratitude, and demand a tribute of praise from the whole world. Hence the soul that feels its obligations for them, would be glad to interest the whole creation in the blessed work of praise and thanksgiving. *This* David attempts in many of his psalms: “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the Lord with me; and let us exalt his name together^k!” — — — Had any reflection been cast on him for these devout acknowledgments, he would have replied, as on another occasion, “Is there not a cause^l?” or rather, would have welcomed the disgrace, and said, “I will yet be more vile than thus^m.”]

2. From a sense of love to his fellow-creatures—

^g ver. 19. ^h Lam. iii. 55—57.

ⁱ Ps. xxxiv. 4, 6.

^k Ps. xxxiv. 1—3. and xcvi. 1—4.

^l 1 Sam. xvii. 29.

^m 1 Sam. vi. 22.

[Nothing is more gratifying to the saints than to see or hear what God has done for others. To them therefore David addresses himself. He speaks not to the ungodly; for that would be to "cast pearls before swine:" but to the godly he knew that the recital of his experience would be a rich source of comfort and encouragement. In another place he explicitly avows this very intention; and, for the promotion of that end, he gives a summary of the Lord's dealings with him during his long impenitence, and on the very first symptoms of penitence and contritionⁿ. It is with a similar view that Paul also records his own wickedness in persecuting the Church of Christ; and displays the enormous unparalleled exercise of God's mercy towards him "the chief of sinners:" he declares, that this whole dispensation towards him was designed by God himself as a pattern for the encouragement of all penitents to the end of time^o. We then, if we "fear God," are the persons invited to come and listen to the voice of David. In all that he has spoken on this subject, he has sought our good: for it was not to him as a prophet that this mercy was vouchsafed, but as a saint, who feared God and wrought righteousness: and every one who in this respect resembles him, may hope to participate with him in his exalted privileges^p.]

As saints indeed we profess to have already enjoyed them in some measure: and therefore we are concerned to inquire,

III. How we may know whether our souls be partakers of the same benefit—

It is the privilege of all to have access to God, and to have their prayers answered by him: yea, and to know also that they have been answered. Of this we are assured on the authority of God himself——But here the question arises, How shall these answers be clearly known to have come from God? Formerly God was pleased to make known to his people their interest in his favour by means which we are no longer to expect. He *may* indeed, if he see fit, still reveal his will to men by dreams and visions, by voices and signs; but we have no reason to think he either does, or will do so; and therefore we can place no confidence in any mani-

ⁿ Ps. xxxii. 3—6.

^o 1 Tim. i. 13—16.

^p Compare Ps. lxxv. 2. and Isai. lxxv. 24. and John xiv. 13, 14. with 1 John v. 13—15.

festations which are professedly derived from such sources. We may also say, that nothing certain can be known from any direct impressions of the Spirit of God upon the mind. We are far from affirming that no such impressions are ever made: for there can be no doubt but that God “sheds abroad his love in the hearts of his people,” and gives them “a spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father,” and “by his Spirit witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of God,” and even “seals them by the Holy Spirit of promise unto the day of redemption.” But still, great and glorious as these operations of the Spirit are, they are not sufficient *of themselves* to prove that God has shewn mercy to our souls: they must have the concurring evidence of good works resulting from them: the feelings themselves may be so closely imitated by Satan, that it shall be impossible for man certainly to distinguish between them: a person of a warm imagination and a confident mind may easily be wrought upon by that subtle spirit, so that he shall appear both to himself and others to be eminently distinguished by manifestations from God, whilst yet he is only under the influence of a Satanic delusion. The evidences whereby alone the work of God upon the soul can be satisfactorily ascertained are,

1. The exercise of gracious affections—

[Love, joy, peace, with all the train of Christian virtues, are the fruits of God’s Spirit alone. They cannot for any length of time be counterfeited: not even Satan himself can produce them. Hence we are told, by our blessed Lord, to look to them as the only certain marks and evidences whereby his people can be distinguished: “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Would you then know for certain whether God has had mercy on your souls, and whether the supposed manifestations of God’s love to your souls are genuine, see how the dispensation operates on your hearts and lives. If it lead you to a sense of lively gratitude to God, if it fill you with a determination to serve and glorify him with all your powers, if it encourage you to commit your every concern to his all-wise disposal, and if it stimulate you to seek by all possible means the welfare of your fellow-creatures, you may confidently say, “He that hath wrought us to the selfsame thing is God.”]

2. The mortification of all sin—

[David says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me^a.” To fancy therefore that we have received answers to prayer, whilst there is any sinful temper or disposition harboured in the heart, is a fatal delusion. Even the ungodly Jews, who set themselves in opposition to Christ, were fully convinced of this truth: for, imagining him to be a sinner, and taking occasion from thence to deny the miracle he had wrought, they said, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners; but if any man be a worshipper of God and do his will, him he heareth^r.” This then must be a point of diligent inquiry; ‘Is sin in general dispossessed of its power over me? is my besetting sin in particular subdued and mortified? is my hatred to sin inveterate, uniform, unreserved?’ Unless this be our state, it is in vain that we pretend to communion with the Deity, and boast of our assured acceptance with him: if we are under the habitual influence of any one reigning lust, of whatever kind it be, we may make a great profession of religion, but we are hypocrites; we may make a noise about it, but “we are as sounding brass, and as tinkling cymbals.”]

In reference to this subject, we beg leave to offer
some ADVICE—

1. Be careful to notice the dealings of God with your souls—

[Many set themselves against all kinds of Christian experience, and make even the very word, *experience*, a subject of continual ridicule and invective. That injudicious persons have given but too just ground of offence by their statements of their own feelings, must be confessed: but we must not therefore suppose that religion has nothing to do with the feelings, and that it is a matter purely intellectual. Why should that alone have no influence on the heart, when it is calculated more than any thing else to call into activity all the powers of our souls? or why should *that* be enthusiasm in religion, which is deemed reasonable in all the common affairs of life? Let a man be embarked in any thing that greatly involves his honour and interest throughout his life; a merchant in trade; a commander in war; a student in academic contests: will he feel no anxieties? will he have no fluctuations of mind, no alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow, according as his prospects brighten or are obscured? will the issue of his labours be to him such a matter of indifference, that he shall contemplate the probabilities of success or failure without any emotion? And if these diversified feelings are so called forth

^a ver. 18.

^r John ix. 31.

by things which pertain to this life, shall they have no scope for exercise in the things which relate to eternity? Call them by the name of Christian experience, or by any other name, they must have place in our souls; and if they have not, we are altogether dead in trespasses and sins. Let every one then take notice how he is affected with his everlasting concerns: for *he* can never have obtained mercy, who has not sought for mercy; nor *he* have received an answer to prayer, who never cried from his inmost soul to God. I must even go farther, and say, *he* has no hope, who never had a fear; nor shall *he* ever taste of joy, who has never been bowed down with penitential sorrow. As we deal with God, he will deal with us: "If we seek him, he will be found of us; but if we forsake him, he will forsake us.]"

2. Learn to estimate them by a right standard—

[If we judge of our emotions by their intenseness, or by the degree of elevation or depression produced by them, we shall deceive our own souls. The votaries of false religions are sometimes transported beyond the bounds of reason, and are agitated even to madness. A mistaken course of religion too, will often operate very strongly on the mind, and leave us, after all, in a state of spiritual death. True religion is sober, discreet, practical: it consists in, or rather is inseparably connected with, "a spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind." It directs to heaven; but does not lead us to neglect our earthly duties. It must be judged of by its practical effects. The grace that leaves us under the defilement of any "spiritual or fleshly filthiness," is no grace. That alone comes from God, which leads to God; and that alone will have any saving efficacy, which assimilates us to "the Divine image in righteousness and true holiness.]"

3. Endeavour to improve them for the good of others—

[We are not proprietors of our talents, but stewards, to whom they are entrusted for the good of others. We must indeed be much on our guard against conceit, and talkativeness, and a readiness to draw attention to ourselves, and to make *self* the topic of our conversation. A person of this complexion is a very hateful and disgusting character: and too many such, it must be confessed, there are in the religious world. But whilst we avoid such a spirit as this, we must delight to communicate to others the blessings we have received, and to encourage from our own experience a diligent and patient waiting upon God. It is obvious, that if we can say, "What my eyes have seen, my ears have heard, and my hands have handled of the word of life, that same declare I unto you," our words will come with tenfold weight. We repeat however, that a general communicating of our experiences in large companies is in our judgment

highly inexpedient: it is a fruitful source of pride, discouragement, and hypocrisy. But in the confidence of friendship we may unbosom ourselves one to another, and declare, to the abundant edification both of ourselves and others, what God has done for our souls. In seasons of temptation and spiritual trouble, we may by such a communication administer unspeakable comfort to an afflicted brother^s. Nor is it necessary that we advert particularly to ourselves: if we give the result of our experience, the effect will be the same. The light we have received should not be hid under a bushel: if we have “freely received, we should freely give.”]

^s 2 Cor. i. 6.

DCVII.

SIN A PREVENTIVE TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR PRAYERS.

Ps. lxi. 18—20. *If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. But verily God hath heard me: he hath attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who hath not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me!*

THE communion of saints is an exalted privilege; and “they who fear the Lord will speak often one to another” upon the subjects which are most interesting to their souls. To magnify the grace of God, and to encourage one another in the ways of holiness, will be delightful to them, and will tend exceedingly to their mutual improvement. Hence David invited his pious brethren to hear the communications which he had to make on this all-important subject: “Come and hear, all ye that fear God! and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.” Then he tells them of God’s answers to his prayers; but at the same time informs them, that there was one condition only on which either they or he could hope for the acceptance of their prayers, namely, that they put away all sin without hesitation and without exception: for “if they regarded iniquity in their heart, the Lord would not hear them.”

From the whole of this communication we see,

II. God’s abhorrence of sin, when harboured and indulged—

“God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity^a:”

^a Hab. i. 13.

though he tolerates it in the world, he will sooner or later manifest his indignation against it. But in none does he abhor it more, than in those who profess themselves his people: according to what is written, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities^b.”

To those who live in the commission of it he will not lend an ear—

[There are seasons when the most careless persons will call upon God: “In the time of their trouble they will say, Arise, and save us^c,” and “they will pour out a prayer when some heavy chastening is upon them^d.” Not that they desire deliverance from sin: it is trouble alone that they are anxious to get rid of; and *that* removed, they would return with pleasure to their former ways. Such were the Jews in the wilderness: “When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant^e.” But it is in vain for such hypocrites to hope that God will hear their prayers: for the very “sacrifices of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord^f,” and of this God has fully warned us. He has declared, that “though they *cry*, he will not hear them^g,” yea, “though they *cry in his ears, with a loud voice^h*,” yea, “though they make *many prayersⁱ*,” yea, though with their prayers “they *fast, and offer burnt-offerings and oblations^k*,” so far from listening to them, he will turn a deaf ear to their petitions, and even laugh at the calamities which they either feel or fear^l. He will recompense them according to their doings. In the day that he called to them, “they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear: and therefore, as *he* cried, and *they* would not hear; so when *they* cry, he will not hear^m.”]

Even where sin is not openly indulged, but only harboured in the heart, God will resent it in this way—

[Sin, however secret, is not hidden from him: for He sees it, under whatever form it may exist, and in the inmost recesses of the heart: “He searcheth the heart,” and “weigheth the

^b Amos iii. 2.

^c Ps. lxxviii. 34—37.

^h Ezek. viii. 18.

^l Prov. i. 24—32.

^e Jer. ii. 27.

^f Prov. xxi. 27.

ⁱ Isai. i. 12—15.

^m Zech. vii. 11, 13.

^d Isai. xxvi. 16.

^g Jer. xi. 11.

^k Jer. xiv. 12.

spirits." Indeed, hypocrisy is not a whit less hateful to him than open sin. Let us hear the testimony of holy Job: "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul? Will God hear his cry when trouble cometh upon him?" Even the most uninstructed of men, who had been born blind, and had had his eyes just recently opened, could say, "We know that God heareth not sinners^o:" and so self-evident was that truth, that not one of his most subtle and malignant enemies could gainsay or resist it. There is, in fact, a general conviction of it in the consciences of all, insomuch that God himself appealed to his hypocritical adversaries respecting it; "Shall I be inquired of by you, O house of Israel? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you^p:" Whether "the idol" be in the house or "in the heart," it is equally hateful in the sight of God, who "requireth truth in the inward parts^q," and will accept none but "those who worship him in spirit and in truth^r."]

On the other hand, no language can express,

II. His condescension to sinners who are truly upright before him—

David, though a sinner of no common stamp, was yet upright before God, as a penitent: for he bitterly bewailed his sins, and sought deliverance from them with his whole heart. There was no iniquity which he desired to hide from God, or to retain within his own bosom. Hence he found acceptance with God, and could bear testimony that God had heard and answered his petitions. And thus, wherever there is a true penitent, we are warranted to assure him,

1. That God will be merciful to his sins—

[It is not sin lamented, but sin retained, or "regarded with complacency in the heart," that will provoke God's indignation against us. A weeping sinner he will receive to mercy, "even though his sins may have been of a crimson or a scarlet dye." Never, from the foundation of the world, was one cast out who sought him with real penitence and faith. Manasseh was, perhaps, of all the children of men, the most criminal; yet was not even he rejected, when he truly humbled himself before the Lord his God^s. And we are authorized to assure the whole world, that if they seek the Lord with their whole hearts, "he will not turn away their prayer, nor his mercy

ⁿ Job xxvii. 8, 9.

^o John ix. 31.

^p Ezek. xx. 3, 31.

^q Ps. li. 6.

^r John iv. 24.

^s 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13, 19.

from them:" on the contrary, "he will blot out their iniquities as a morning cloud," and "cast all their sins irrecoverably into the very depths of the sea"— — —]

2. That he will be gracious to their prayers—

[There is no want so great, but he will supply it; no concern so small, but he will take the charge of it, and order it for our good. We may go into his presence as to a loving Father, assured, that "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Even the sigh, "the cry, the very breathing" of desire will be understood by him, and come up with acceptance before him^t; and, as in David's case, our prayers shall be turned into songs of praise and thanksgiving — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Beware of harbouring any secret lust—

[Sin is deceitful; and our treacherous hearts are ever ready to put a favourable construction upon it. But God can discern it, under whatever garb it may be disguised, and by whatever name it may be distinguished. It may be amongst "the things which are highly esteemed amongst men: but it will still be an abomination in the sight of God." It may be something as dear to us as a right eye, or as necessary, in our apprehension, as a right hand: but it must be put away, however painful the separation may be: for, if it be spared and retained, it will destroy both body and soul in hell. I must entreat you, therefore, to examine carefully the state of your souls, and with the utmost diligence to "purge out the old leaven" that defiles them. The Jews were wont, at the time of the passover, to sweep their houses with incredible care, lest one atom of leaven should be left in any corner or recess: and this affords a good example to us in relation to our souls. Yet I would not have you rest satisfied with any endeavours of your own; but beg of God to search and try you, and to see if there be any wicked way in you, and to lead you in the way everlasting: for, as a single leak will sink a ship, so a single lust, unmortified and unsubdued, will sink the soul into everlasting perdition. Oh, think with yourselves, how awful it will be in the last day to cry unto your God, and not be heard! to stand imploring him, "Lord, Lord, open unto us;" and to receive for answer that terrible sentence, "Depart from me, ye who wrought iniquity!" May God avert from all of you this fearful doom! and may you all be approved of him at last, as "Israelites indeed, in whom was no guile!"]

2. Improve, while you may, the manifold grace of God—

^t Lam. iii. 55, 56.

[A throne of grace is now open to us; and "we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." God assumes to himself the very title of "a God that heareth prayer." And he bids us to open our mouths wide, that he may fill them. Moreover, "we have an Advocate with the Father, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself," "whom the Father heareth always;" and who has so loved us, as to "give himself a propitiation for our sins." O, what might we not receive, if only we were upright before God! for "the prayer of the upright is his delight." Suppose now at this time we had all been really praying to God, in the very spirit of the prayers which we have offered; what blessings would not be flowing down into our souls, even as "showers of blessings," as God himself has promised! Verily, if our eyes were opened to see what was passing, we should behold Almighty God taking loads of guilt from multitudes amongst us, and casting it all into the very depths of the sea. We should see the Holy Spirit resting on the heads of all, as on the day of Pentecost, for the purpose of enlightening, comforting, and sanctifying our souls. We should see angels ascending and descending upon us, in order to receive from God, and execute for us, their several commissions adapted to our necessities. I do not hesitate to say, that, if we had all been as much in earnest in our prayers as our words have given reason to expect, this very place would resemble the temple of old, when the glory of God so filled it, that the priests could no longer abide there to minister before the Lord. Yes, our souls would be too full for humanity to sustain it. Dear Brethren, why should we not behold at least a measure of this sacred effusion, and taste a measure of this heavenly grace? God is willing to renew the Pentecostal scenes, if only we were in a state to receive them. It is in ourselves that we are straitened: we are not straitened in our God: he is as able as ever, yea, and as willing too, "to do exceeding abundantly for us, above all that we can ask or think." Truly, if we were even one half as earnest as we have professed to be, he would fill every hungry soul, and replenish every sorrowful soul, with his richest communications of grace and peace. Let us arise and call upon our God: and let not "our prayer go forth out of feigned lips." And let us remember, for our comfort, that it is not the *existence* of sin in the soul that will prevent the acceptance of our prayers, (for who then would ever be heard?) but the *indulgence* of it. Seek truly to have the whole body of sin mortified within you: seek to be "pure, as God is pure," and "holy, as God is holy." Then will God delight himself in you; and you, according to your measure, shall "be filled with all the fulness of your God."]

DCVIII.

CALLING OF THE GENTILES PRAYED FOR.

Ps. lxvii. 1—7. *God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us: that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations. Let the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee. O let the nations be glad, and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase: and God, even our own God, shall bless us: God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear him.*

HOW much importance the compilers of our Liturgy attached to this psalm may be judged from the appointment of it to be read in the daily services of our Church. The general import of the psalm is plain enough: but, in order to get a just view of the different expressions contained in it, we must place ourselves in the situation of David at the time he composed it. The Jewish Church and nation were a peculiar people, instructed in the knowledge of salvation, and living under the government of Jehovah. The righteous among them enjoyed the light of God's countenance, and looked forward to the possession of yet richer blessings under the reign of their Messiah. But the Gentile world were altogether ignorant of a Saviour, and living without God in the world, under the tyranny of the prince of darkness, by whom they were led captive at his will. These two things then the Psalmist desired, namely, the advent of the Messiah to his own nation, and the manifestation of him to all the world. The former of these events was prayed for in the beginning of the psalm; "God be merciful unto us, and bless us" with the accomplishment of that promise, to which all thy people are looking forward, the advent of the Messiah: and "cause thy face to shine upon us," in the person of Him, who is "the brightness of thy glory, and the express image of thy person!" The latter event however seems on this occasion to have chiefly occupied his mind: and

the immediate exhibition of Christ to the Jews was desired, in order to his ulterior manifestation to the Gentile world, whom he longed to see partakers of all the privileges which he either enjoyed, or hoped for. He longed to see them brought into "the way" of truth and "salvation," and subjected to the "righteous government" of the Messiah, and growing up before God in multitudes, "like the piles of grass upon the earth^a."

This being the general subject of the psalm, we shall proceed to notice some important instruction that is to be gathered from it. It shews us,

I. That there are rich blessings yet in store for the Gentiles—

[The whole psalm might with great propriety be read in the future tense, as a prophecy. In the two concluding verses of the psalm it is so read in our translation: and it might have been so read throughout. And in that view how singularly striking is it! how strong and numerous the assertions, that such an event shall take place! At present indeed there seems to be but little prospect of so glorious an event: but we are well assured it shall come, and *that* too at no distant period. Indeed in part it is already come: for who are we but Gentiles? By the preaching of the Apostles, myriads were converted to the faith of Christ: and myriads are yet monuments of his power and grace. But this is only the first-fruits: we expect a harvest, when "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." We believe that the day is coming when "all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves, and turn unto the Lord their God:" "they shall fear the Lord their God, and David their king^b." "The way" of salvation through a crucified Redeemer "shall then be known among them," and "the saving health" of the Gospel be then imparted to those who are now dying in their sins. The bond-slaves of sin and Satan shall then cast off the yoke of their oppressor, and yield themselves willing subjects to the Prince of Peace. In a word, they who have hitherto known no pleasure but in the indulgence of their lusts, shall "be glad in the Lord, and sing praise to his name," and "rejoice in him" as their God for ever and ever. Glorious period! May "God hasten it in his time!"]

^a ver. 6. with Ps. lxxii. 16. Compare Isai. xxxv. 1, 2. and lv. 12, 13.

^b Hos. iii. 5.

It further shews us,

II. What an union there is between piety and philanthropy—

[The Jews were represented by their enemies as haters of mankind. But this was in no respect applicable to the godly among them. What could exceed the love of David towards the Gentile world? We cannot conceive greater earnestness than is expressed for their welfare in this psalm. David seems scarcely to think that he himself is blessed, whilst the Gentile world remain destitute of any share in his blessings. This philanthropy was the fruit of his piety: and wherever true piety exists, it will shew itself in a concern for those who are afar off from God, and perishing in their sins. All piety that is devoid of charity, is a mere name, a phantom, a delusion. "If," says an inspired Apostle, "we see our brother have need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in us?" And if this be true in relation to his temporal wants, how much more is it respecting the wants of his soul! We wish all then to judge of their piety by this touchstone: see what measure of compassion you have to your perishing fellow-creatures: see what pleasure you have in contemplating the future accession of the Gentiles to the faith of Christ; what efforts you make to promote it; and what earnestness you have when praying for it at a throne of grace. These things will lead you into a considerable degree of self-knowledge: for be assured you know but little of the saving efficacy of Christ's blood, or the sanctifying efficacy of his grace, if you are not longing and labouring to bring others to a participation of your blessings.]

We may further LEARN,

III. What encouragement we have for missionary exertions—

[If nothing had been spoken in the Scriptures respecting the conversion of the heathen, we might well sit down in despair and say, It is in vain to attempt so hopeless a work. But when we look into the Scriptures and see how continually this subject is brought forward, and with what confidence it is declared, we should make no account of difficulties, since "with God all things are possible." Ezekiel might have objected to the commission given to him to preach to dry bones: but he knew that dry bones could live, if God should be pleased to breathe life into them^c. Thus may we engage in missionary labours, assured that God will fulfil his own word, and crown our endeavours with success. Indeed

^c Ezek. xxxvii. 1—14.

the time for the full accomplishment of his promise seems fast approaching; and "the fields appear already, as it were, white unto the harvest." Methinks the heathen in divers countries are saying to us, not by their necessities only, but by their express desires, "Come over to us, and help us!" And shall we be backward to impart the knowledge with which we are so highly favoured, and the salvation which we profess to glory in? It is obvious enough, that they cannot learn unless they be taught; "nor can they hear, without a preacher." Let not difficulties then dismay us: but let us go forth in the strength of the Lord God, and look to him to accompany his word with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven: then may we hope that Satan's empire shall be destroyed, and that the promised kingdom of our Redeemer shall be established on its ruins.]

DCIX.

THE END OF CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

Ps. lxviii. 18. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.*

WHILE some give an unbounded scope to their fancy, and view Christ in almost every passage of the Scriptures, others run into a contrary extreme, and scarcely behold him even in the most express prophecies. But there certainly are many parts of the prophetic writings, and particularly of the Psalms, which, to whomsoever they relate in a literal sense, have a spiritual or mystical reference to Christ: nor can we err in interpreting them of him, while we take the inspired Apostles for our guides.

David, having vanquished all his enemies, determined to provide a fixed residence for the ark of God, that God might dwell in the midst of his people at Jerusalem. And he penned this psalm to be used on that occasion^a. But St. Paul informs us, that there was a further reference in it to the ascension of Christ; who, being the true ark whereon the glory rested, went, after having triumphed over all his

^a It is thought that ver. 1—6. was sung when the ark was taken up by the Levites; ver. 7—14. while they were on their way to the hill, till they came in sight of it; ver. 15—17. while they were ascending it; and ver. 18—23. when the ark was deposited.

enemies, to his fixed abode in heaven; and, *having received* gifts as the fruits of his victories, *gave* them unto men, and provided that God should have a stated residence in his Church^b.

With this inspired comment, we may proceed with confidence to consider,

I. The manner of Christ's ascension—

Christ, having submitted to the deepest humiliation, was now to receive a proportionable advancement, which, having already been begun in his resurrection, was now perfected in his ascension. This was,

1. Glorious—

[In verse 17, the glory of it is described, and it is compared with the descent of Jehovah on Mount Sinai. While he was in the very act of blessing his disciples^c, he was taken up by a cloud, as Elijah was in his fiery chariot, to heaven. Instantly myriads of the heavenly host surrounded him with their acclamations and hosannas. They had surveyed him with astonishment from the first moment that he came into the world. When he yet lay in the manger, they sang, "Glory to God in the highest!" But, when they beheld him agonizing in the garden, and expiring on the cross, we may almost conceive their songs of joy to have been turned into weeping and lamentation. We doubt not, however, but at this time their joy exceeded all that they had ever felt from their first creation. They now saw their Creator and their God, who had so long veiled himself in human flesh, ascending to his bright abodes, to display his glory in a light infinitely surpassing all that they had ever seen before. What must his redeemed people also have felt the very instant that he entered the portals of heaven! with what rapture and ecstasies must they have been filled! But our imagination cannot grasp the thought. We must be in heaven ourselves before we can form the smallest idea of their felicity. Suffice it then to say with the angelic messengers, that, as he ascended up into heaven, so will he speedily come again from heaven; and that in the meantime, instead of gazing with unprofitable curiosity, we must look for his blessings, and devote ourselves to his service^d.]

2. Triumphant—

^b Eph. iv. 8. The Apostle, in citing the Psalmist's words, makes a slight alteration in them: instead of "*received* gifts *for*," he puts "*gave* gifts *to*." But the truth contained in them is the same: for Christ *received* gifts *for* men *in order that* he might *give* them *to* men.

^c Luke xxiv. 51.

^d Acts i. 10, 11.

[In his death he seemed vanquished; but in reality he overcame; and in his ascension he led captive all his enemies and ours. *Sin* had diffused its poison through all the descendants of Adam, and had infected all their powers both of body and soul. But Christ, having expiated its guilt, now rescued many vassals from its power. *Satan*, the god of this world, who had hitherto usurped dominion and led men captive at his will, now "fell from heaven like lightning;" and his throne, shaken to its foundations, was demolished. *Death* also, that had reigned over all, now was vanquished in its turn; for Jesus "burst its bands." "By death, he destroyed death, and him that had the power of death, that is, the devil^e:" and now, as a mighty conqueror, that had "spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly^f," and led them captive at his chariot wheels.]

From contemplating the manner of his ascension, let us proceed to consider,

II. The ends of it—

There were some ends that respected Christ himself, namely, that he might receive his reward, and carry on his work within the vail: but we must confine ourselves to those which respect the Church.

1. The immediate end—

[As Jesus died, so he rose and ascended in a public capacity, as our mediator with God. He had purchased blessings for us; and he now went to *receive them* at his Father's hands, *that he might impart* them to us. He was henceforth to have all fulness treasured up in himself, that we might receive out of it according to our necessities. He ascended, "that he might fill all things," and "impart repentance and remission of sins," together with all the gifts and graces of his Spirit, to his chosen people. That this was the immediate end of his ascension, appears not only from his own predictions respecting it^g, but from the express declaration of the apostles on the descent of the Holy Ghost^h. Yet it was not for those only who were waiting for redemption, but even "for the rebellious also," that he received gifts; as he abundantly testified in the conversion of his murderers; and as he is ready to testify in the conversion of us also.]

2. The remote end—

[It was the privilege of the Jewish Church to have the symbols of God's presence in their temple. But it is our privilege to have God himself both *with us*, and *in us*. He

^e Heb. ii. 14. ^f Col. ii. 15. ^g John xvi. 7. ^h Acts ii. 33.

will make our hearts his habitation; he will dwell in us, and cause his glory to fill our souls. This was a further end of Christ's ascension, as he himself tells us: "I will pray the Father for you; and he will send you another comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, &c.; for he *dwelleth with* you, and *shall be in you*." Even the most rebellious heart, that has defied the Majesty of heaven, and despised hitherto all overtures of mercy, may yet be encouraged to look up to him; and the soul that has been filled with all iniquity may yet become the temple of the living God. Other conquerors, in the day of their triumph, have scattered largesses among their admiring followers; but this greatest of all gifts will Jesus bestow on his most inveterate enemies: let them only repent, and call upon his name, and he will give them all the riches both of grace and glory.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let none despair of *mercy*—

[We might have well supposed, that the ascension of Jesus would rather have been for the inflicting of judgments on his enemies: yet, behold, it was for the express purpose of exercising mercy. Let us not proudly deny that we are rebels; but, humbling ourselves before him as the chief of sinners, let us desire him to display the exceeding riches of his grace in his mercy towards us.]

2. Let none despair of *victory*—

[Conflicts we must have, as long as we continue in the body; but in the very midst of them we may say, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Does *sin* harass and defile us? Christ says, "It shall never have dominion over us." Does *Satan* seek to deceive or devour us? His head was bruised by Christ, and "he shall soon be bruised under our feet also." Does *death* alarm us? Its sting is drawn; it is "swallowed up in victory;" it is among our richest treasures^k. Let us view Christ leading them all captive in his ascension; and know that, through Him, we also shall be more than conquerors.]

ⁱ John xiv. 16, 17.

^k 1 Cor. iii. 22.

DCX.

GRATITUDE TO GOD FOR HIS BENEFITS.

Ps. lxxviii. 19, 20. *Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation! He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.*

THE service of God is beneficial to the soul, not merely as bringing down a divine blessing upon us, but in that it prepares and attunes the soul for further services. David had been carrying up the ark to Jerusalem, to place it in the sanctuary on Mount Zion. And now, having already celebrated the praises of Jehovah for his dealings with his people in former ages, and for the present ceremony, as typical of the Messiah's exaltation after he should have completed his work on earth; and having deposited the ark in its proper place; he bursts forth into general acknowledgments of God's mercies to his people, and devout ascriptions of praise to him, for all the wonders of his love.

Now we, Brethren, have been engaged in the holy service of worshipping our God. But shall we be satisfied with that? No: I would have that service to be a preparation for a still further honouring of God, whilst we contemplate with devoutest admiration,

I. The blessings with which he has loaded us—

And here I might expatiate on the *temporal* benefits which are poured out upon us daily, in the richest abundance; I might enumerate the various comforts that are ministered to us, in all the works both of creation and providence. But the inspired comment which we have on this passage leads our mind to far higher benefits, even to all the blessings of redemption. St. Paul quotes the words before my text, and declares them to have been fulfilled in the ascension of our blessed Lord and Saviour, and in his bestowment of spiritual blessings on his Church^a.

Let us contemplate, then,

1. The ordinances of his grace—

[This is the first thing mentioned by St. Paul in the passage to which I have referred: "He gave gifts unto men: he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of

^a Eph. iv. 7, 8, 11, 12, 13.

Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And is this benefit confined to the apostolic age? If we have not Prophets and Apostles, have we not pastors and teachers? And if we see not thousands converted at a time, do we not still see the Church augmented and edified in the midst of us? Yes: we have the same doctrines preached to us as were delivered in the days of old, and the same blessed effects produced by them: and it becomes us to be duly sensible of this mercy, and to bless our God for it from our inmost souls.]

2. The gift of his Spirit—

[This, you know, was the immediate consequence of our Lord's ascension: he poured out his Spirit both on his disciples and on his enemies, on the day of Pentecost; for the instruction of the one, and the conversion of the other. And though we no longer have the Holy Spirit in his miraculous powers, have we not still his enlightening, sanctifying, and comforting energies experienced amongst us? Many, I trust, who are here present, can attest, that the Spirit still accompanies the word, and makes it "sharper than any two-edged sword," and effectual for the ends for which God, in his tender mercy, has sent it^b. Even where it has not yet wrought for the conversion of the soul, it has, in ten thousand instances, striven with us, to bring us to repentance. Perhaps, amongst us all, there is not one who has not felt his motions within him, and heard his gracious whispers, saying, "Repent, and turn unto thy God." For this, then, we have also reason to adore our God: for, next to the gift of God's only dear Son to die for us, is the gift of his Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and to impart unto us all the blessings of salvation.]

3. The knowledge^a of his Son—

[This has God richly imparted to our souls. Say, Brethren, has not "the Lord Jesus Christ been evidently set forth crucified amongst you?" You yourselves will bear us witness, that from the very beginning of our ministry we "determined to know nothing amongst you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The dignity of his person, the nature of his work, the suitableness of his offices, the freeness and fulness of his salvation, have been ever exhibited to your view, in order that you might believe in him, and, "believing, might have life through his name." This knowledge, in St. Paul's estimation, infinitely exceeded every other; yea, in comparison of it he regarded "all other things as dross and dung." Yet is this bestowed on you, in all its clearest evidence, and in all its sanctifying and saving operations.]

^b Isai. lv. 10, 11.

4. The hope of his glory—

[By the Gospel which ye hear, not only are life and immortality brought to light, but they are brought home to your souls as actually attained in Christ Jesus. He is your Forerunner; he is gone to prepare a place for you; and, if only you truly believe in him, you may survey all the glory of heaven, and claim it as your own: for his throne is your throne, his kingdom your kingdom, his glory your glory^c. This is “the inheritance to which you are begotten; and for which, by the almighty power of God, you are reserved^d.”

These are some of the benefits with which you are loaded from day to day. Say whether you have not reason to bless God for them, and from your inmost souls to say, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath *blessed us with all spiritual blessings* in heavenly places in Christ^e.”]

But, from the gifts, let us, in our contemplations, rise to,

II. The Author and Giver of them all—

He is here described by,

1. His proper character—

[We must not forget that it is the Lord Jesus Christ who ascended to heaven, and who bestows these gifts upon men. In the Scriptures he is continually called “a Saviour:” but here he is *repeatedly*, and *with very peculiar emphasis*, called “the God of salvation:” “He that is our God, is the God of salvation.” Now I conceive that, by this appellation, David designed to characterize the Lord Jesus as possessing in himself all the fulness that was necessary for our salvation, and as imparting every distinct blessing with as much zeal and love as if that were the only blessing which he was qualified to bestow. In our unconverted state, we need from God all imaginable *patience* and forbearance: and, for our comfort, he is declared to be “the God of patience^f.” To turn us completely unto him, we need an abundance of every kind of *grace*: and he is “the God of all grace^g.” In returning to God, we hope to obtain *peace*: and he is “the God of peace^h.” As the ultimate end of our conversion, we hope to obtain *glory*: and he is “the God of gloryⁱ.” We cannot conceive of any thing which we stand in need of, in order to our complete salvation, but there is all fulness of it treasured up for us in Christ Jesus; and of that fulness we may all receive to

^c Rev. iii. 21. Luke xxii. 29. John xvii. 22

^d 1 Pet. i. 3—5.

^e Eph. i. 3.

^f Rom. xv. 5.

^g 1 Pet. v. 10.

^h Heb. xiii. 20.

ⁱ Acts vii. 2.

the utmost possible extent of our necessities. In truth, the benefits we do receive are only the emanations of love from him, even as the rays of light which every moment proceed from the sun: and if any possess them not, it is not owing to any want of liberality in God, but because they foolishly and wickedly bar their hearts against the admission of his gifts. Ascend then, Brethren, from the gifts to the Giver, and from the streams to the Fountain-head, and see what a fulness there is in him for all the sinners of mankind! and, from blessing your God and Saviour on account of what he has imparted to you, learn to adore and magnify him for what he is in himself, even on account of his own proper character, as “the God of salvation.”]

2. His peculiar office—

[“Unto God the Lord belong the issues from death.” And is this also spoken of the Lord Jesus? Hear what Jesus himself, after his ascension, said to the Apostle John: “Fear not: I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death^k.” He who is the God of salvation has a perfect control over every enemy; so that none can assault us without his special permission; nor can all the powers of darkness prevail over the least or the meanest of his people. “He openeth, and no man shutteth; and he shutteth, and no man openeth.” Satan could not assault Job, or even enter into the herd of swine, before he had obtained permission from the Lord: nor can he now prevail to injure us, either in body or in soul, any farther than our infinitely wise and gracious God sees fit to permit. Our Lord has assured us, not only, “that no weapon which is formed against us shall prosper, but that the smith himself, who forms the weapon, derives his very existence from him, and subsists alone by his power. Consequently, we have none to fear; and “every tongue, whether of men or devils, that shall rise against us in judgment, we shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord^l.”

Contemplate, I pray you, this glorious and all-sufficient Saviour; and there will be no end to your praises, no limit to your adorations and thanksgivings.]

SEE, Brethren, from hence,

1. What is the proper employment of a saint on earth—

[The ignorant and ungodly world are mostly occupied in ruminating on their troubles, and in casting reflections upon

^k Rev. i. 17, 18.

^l Isai. liv. 16, 17.

those who are the authors of them. But how much sweeter employment have you, my Brethren! You are surveying your blessings, and almost groaning under the load with which your grateful mind is overwhelmed and oppressed: and, at the same time, you are adoring your Benefactor, and giving him the glory due unto his name. *This* is a sweet employment. *This* is worthy of a redeemed soul. O let it be your occupation day and night! and let the incessant language of your hearts be, "Bless the Lord, O my soul! and let all that is within me bless his holy name."]

2. What a preparation the Christian's services in this world are for his enjoyments in the world to come!

[What are they doing in heaven? . Verily, they have no other employment than this—to recount all the mercies which they have received at God's hands; and to adore him for all the perfections of his nature, and for all the wonders of his grace. Conceive of a soul just entering into that world of bliss: hear all its acknowledgments: listen to its songs of praise: follow it through all the courts of heaven, and watch it day and night; and you will see, beyond a doubt, that grace is glory begun, and glory is grace consummated — — —]

DCXI.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD.

Ps. lxxviii. 35. *The God of Israel is he that giveth strength and power unto his people: blessed be God!*

THE consideration of God's power is to his enemies awful in the extreme; but to his friends it affords the richest consolation. The immediate subject of the psalm before us is the carrying up of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to Mount Zion: but the power of God in destroying his enemies, and saving his friends, is celebrated throughout in terms of exultation and triumph. In the words of our text this interesting topic is summed up in few words, and concluded with an expression of adoration, well suited to the subject.

We propose to consider,

I. The description here given of God—

Though at first sight this description of the Divine character does not appear very peculiar, yet, if it be attentively considered, it will be found,

1. Most glorious—

[It imports, in the first place, that *God does give strength and power to his people*: and this is proved by all the sacred annals; yea, by daily experience. He has enabled his people of old to resist the greatest temptations^a, to perform the hardest duties^b, to endure the heaviest afflictions^c, to triumph over the united assaults of earth and hell^d. And many can say at this day, “As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts^e.”

It intimates yet further, that *none but God can give strength to his people*. The mode of expression in the text strongly intimates this. What could the gods of the heathen do for their votaries? God tells them that their senseless idols could not so much as move: they must themselves be carried^f. And as for human confidences, they were also vain: neither the Assyrian, nor Egyptian, nor any other power, could deliver those who trusted in them^g. It was the prerogative of Jehovah alone to afford his people the succours they stood in need of^h.

But the full meaning of the text seems to be, that *God delights in supplying his people's wants*; it is that very character in which he most glories, and by which he most wishes to be known. He is always looking out for opportunities of exercising his power on behalf of his peopleⁱ; and rejoices in every occasion that their necessities afford him of making known to them his power and grace^k.]

2. Most endearing—

[If a person be advancing with a full tide of spiritual prosperity, how can he fail of loving the great Author of all his happiness? Surely every exercise of divine power that he has ever experienced, must render this attribute of the Deity precious to his soul, while he beholds the dangers he has escaped, and the difficulties he has overcome.

To a person weak and drooping, this view of the Deity must be still more delightful. How must he check his unbelieving fears; and say, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God^l!”

Above all, must this description of God be precious to the poor. They are incapable of entering into abstract views of the Divine perfections: but this representation of the Deity they are as capable of comprehending, as the most learned upon earth can be: yes; *he knows both the existence, and the omnipotence, of the Deity, as much from his own inward experience,*

^a Gen. xxxix. 10—12.^b Gen. xxii. 2, 9, 10.^c Heb. xi. 36, 37.^d 2 Cor. xii. 7—10.^e Ps. xlviii. 8.^f Isai. xlvi. 1, 2, 6, 7.^g Isai. xxx. 1—7.^h Ps. lxii. 11.ⁱ 2 Chron. xvi. 9.^k Jer. xxxii. 41.^l Ps. xlii. 11.

as he can possibly do from the visible creation ; because he feels himself to be a living witness of them.]

In order to call forth the practical ends of this description, let us consider,

II. The sentiments it should excite in us—

If the concluding words of our text be understood as referring to the past, they are an expression of gratitude to God ; if as relating to the future, they denote a cheerful affiance in him. We may properly take them in both these senses, and learn from them to exercise,

1. Gratitude—

[While a sense of our own weakness humbles us in the dust, a view of God's power, and a recollection of the experience we have had of his kindness and all-sufficiency, should kindle in our breasts the liveliest gratitude. Who can "look to the rock whence he has been hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence he has been digged^m," and not bless the name of his God ? Who can behold the manner in which others are enslaved by sin and Satan, and not adore the God that has made him free ? So deeply was David impressed with the mercies he had received, that he not only called on his *soul* to bless God, but declared that "all his *bones* should praise himⁿ." And the one inquiry of our hearts should be, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me^o ?"]

2. Affiance—

[The perfections of God in general may well encourage us to trust in him : but his power, together with his disposition to exercise it on our behalf, should lead us to place in him the most unbounded confidence. Difficulties should all vanish, and appear as nothing, when we reflect on him who is engaged for us. The same power that "made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over^p," can smooth all obstructions in our way^q, and make our mountains to become a plain^r. We therefore should trust all our concerns in his hands^s, with an assured hope that we shall never be confounded^t.]

INFER—

1. How little ground is there for *the excuses of the presumptuous !*

[You are ready to vindicate your ungodly ways, by saying, "I cannot live as God requires." But is not God able, yea,

^m Isai. li. 1, 2.

ⁿ Ps. xxxv. 9, 10.

^o Ps. cxvi. 12. and cin. 1, 2.

^p Isai. li. 10.

^q Isai. xl. 4.

^r Zech. iv. 7.

^s Prov. xvi. 3.

^t Ps. cxxv. 1, 2.

and willing too, to assist you? And if you will not seek his assistance, does not the blame rest wholly with yourselves? Know that, however you may justify yourselves now, there is a day coming when you will stand speechless before him.]

2. How little ground is there for *the fears of the desponding*?

[We are but too apt to faint in difficulties, and to think them insurmountable: but if we would habituate ourselves more to look at the power of God, we should proceed with confidence and courage. "Let the weak then say, I am strong." Let them "know in whom they have believed, that He is able to keep that which they have committed to him^u."]]

^u 2 Tim. i. 12.

DCXII.

SORROWS AND SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

Ps. lxix. 1—4. *Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail, while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty. Then I restored that which I took not away.*

SACRED is the retirement of a penitent, and hallowed is the sanctuary where he is pouring out his soul before God: nor could the most obdurate sinner overhear his confessions and supplications, his cries and tears, his importunate pleadings and heart-rending groans, without being filled with awe and reverence. Let us draw nigh then with holy awe to the recesses of that chamber, where, not a sinful creature like ourselves, but our incarnate God, the Saviour of the world, is pouring out his soul under a load of sins imputed to him, and of sorrows the punishment of sin^a. He it is that in the psalm before us is saying, "Save me, O God! for the waters are come in unto my soul." David, it is true, was the writer of the psalm; and in parts of it may be considered as speaking chiefly, if not entirely, of himself:

^a Heb. v. 7.

but in other parts he speaks so entirely in the person of the Messiah whom he typified, that we can scarcely apply the words to any other. Nor whilst we assert this are we in any danger of erring; because our blessed Lord himself, and the Evangelists who wrote his life, and St. Paul also, all concur in putting this very construction upon the psalm, and in citing various parts of it as actually accomplished in Christ. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up^b," is applied to Christ on one occasion; and on another, "They hated me without a cause^c." His general deportment is said to have been predicted in those words, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me^d." At his crucifixion was fulfilled that remarkable prophecy, "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink^e." Even to Judas who betrayed him is one portion of it applied, "Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein^f." After such authorities as these, we do not hesitate to interpret our text as referring to the sufferings of Christ, and as describing,

I. Their overwhelming nature—

If David, as a type, had many things to suffer, much more had that Saviour whom he typified. We will not however speak of his sufferings during the whole period of his sojourning on earth; but of those only which he endured in the closing scenes of his life, and which seem more particularly referred to in the psalm before us. That we may have a more distinct view of them, we will notice,

1. Those which were previous to his apprehension—

[“He had indeed a fearful prospect before him,” a bloody “baptism to be baptized with; and how was he straitened till it should be accomplished^g!”] When the time for its accomplishment drew nigh, his “soul was so troubled, that he knew not what to say.” *As a man*, he felt disposed to deprecate his sufferings, and to be saved from that hour that was fast approaching: but, *as our Mediator*, he would not recede, because

^b John ii. 17.

^c John xv. 25.

^d Rom. xv. 3.

^e John xix. 29.

^f Acts i. 20.

^g Luke xii. 50.

he had come into the world for the express purpose of suffering all that was due to our sins^h. In the garden of Gethsemane his sorrows came yet more heavily upon him, so that he cried, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto deathⁱ." On this occasion he cried repeatedly, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me^k!" And such was the agony of his soul, that "he sweat great drops of blood" from every pore of his body^l. To this period in particular we may suppose the petitions in our text to refer: for then "he offered up his supplications with strong crying and tears^m:" and such were the intenseness of his agony, and the ardour of his importunity, that "his throat was dried," "his eyes failed," his whole nature was exhaustedⁿ, and he needed "an angel to be sent from heaven to strengthen him^o." It must be remembered, that in all this time no man had approached to hurt him: and therefore we are sure that his sorrows proceeded from "the powers of darkness" who were now let loose upon him^p, and from the hand of God himself, who now concurred to inflict upon him^q the curse due to our iniquities^r, which by a covenant-engagement he had undertaken to sustain^s.]

2. Those which he sustained during his trial—

[It was no slight aggravation of his troubles that he was betrayed into the hands of his murderers by a kiss from one of his own disciples, and that "one who had eaten bread with him lifted up his heel against him^t." And when he was seized and bound, he was yet further wounded in his soul by the intemperate zeal of another of his disciples, who, instead of submitting with meekness to the will of God, sought to destroy the adversaries of his Lord^u. From the garden he was hurried to the palace of the high priest, and, subsequently, from one tribunal to another, only to be treated with all manner of indignities, and to be denied that justice which his judges pretended to administer. How inconceivably painful to his mind must it have been, to be arrayed in mock majesty, to be made an object of profane scoffing, to be smitten, and buffeted, and spit upon, and loaded with all manner of accusations, and all this time not to have so much as one of the many myriads whom he had healed to bear testimony in his favour^x; yea, even his own disciples having forsaken him, one indeed excepted, whose presence only aggravated his sorrow, by his impious oaths, and pertinacious denial of his Lord. Even a measure that was adopted with a view to preserve his life,

^h John xii. 27. with John xii. 23, 32, 33. ⁱ Matt. xxvi. 37, 38.

^k Matt. xxvi. 39, 44. ^l Luke xxii. 44. ^m Heb. v. 7.

ⁿ ver. 3. ^o Luke xxii. 43. ^p Luke xxii. 53.

^q Isai. liii. 10. ^r Gal. iii. 13. ^s Ps. xl. 6—8.

^t John xiii. 18. ^u Matt. xxvi. 51, 52. ^x ver. 20.

became a source of still more aggravated woe. Pilate hoped, that, by scourging him, he should pacify those who sought his life: and, the order being given, “the ploughers ploughed upon his back and made long their furrows^y :” but “the whole multitude with insatiate fury cried out, Crucify him, crucify him^z !” and demanded that Barabbas, who was a robber and a murderer, should be preferred before him. Thus was the immaculate Lamb of God condemned to suffer the most cruel and ignominious of all deaths, even the accursed death of the cross.]

3. Those which were consummated in his death—

[From Pilate’s bar he was dragged away to execution. Laden with the cross to which he was to be affixed, he sank under the load, which therefore another was compelled to bear to the place of execution. To this he was fastened with nails through his hands and feet; and then was he raised a naked bloody spectacle to all his enemies. Ah! with what taunts was he then assailed, assailed even by the thieves, who on either side of him were suffering the same punishment! One would have thought that in such a situation at least he might become an object of pity: but no pity was found in the hearts of his blood-thirsty enemies: and their professed readiness to assuage his anguish, was only an impious mockery, and a cruel insult: they gave him “gall and vinegar to drink^a.” But the heaviest load which he had to sustain was laid upon him by other hands than those of man, even by the hands of his heavenly Father. Man could only touch his body: the wounds inflicted on his soul proceeded immediately from God, who then “was pleased to bruise him,” and to punish in him the iniquities of a ruined world. All his other sufferings he endured with lamb-like silence: but this forced from him that heart-rending complaint, “My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?” The darkness which at mid-day, for the space of three hours, veiled the whole land, was a sad emblem of his state, under the agonies of expiring nature, and the wrath of a sin-avenging God. At last, having drunk the very last dregs of that cup which had been put into his hands, he bows his head, and gives up the ghost. “Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow^b ?”]

After this slight sketch of our Redeemer’s sufferings, let us proceed to consider,

II. Their vicarious use—

It might be said of David under many of his persecutions, that “he restored that which he took not away:” for certainly he exercised forbearance, and forgiveness, and a returning of good to a very extra-

^y Ps. cxxix. 3. ^z See ver. 4. ^a ver. 21. ^b Lam. i. 12.

ordinary extent. But a greater than David is here. That glorious person whose sufferings we have been contemplating, suffered not for himself, but for us: “He was cut off, but *not for himself*:”

1. It was not for his own sins—

[He was pure and perfect. His very examinations proved that in this respect he was fit to be an offering for the sins of others, “a lamb without blemish, and without spot.” As he had before challenged his enemies, “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” so the more they laboured to load him with guilt, the more clear and manifest his innocence appeared. His Judge, his fellow-sufferer, his executioner, all proclaimed him innocent. The reason of his death, and his fitness for it, are stated in few words by his beloved disciple, “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin.”]

2. It was for the sins of others—

[In all that he endured, he was our substitute and surety. We had contracted the debt, which he paid: we had sold our inheritance, which he shed his blood to redeem. This is the account given us throughout the whole Scriptures. His sacrifice was prefigured by all the sacrifices under the Levitical law, which in expiating the sins of those who offered them, and in restoring sinners to the favour of their God, might be said to “restore that which they took not away.” But this use of his sufferings is not left to be gathered from types and shadows: it was declared by the prophets in the most express terms. “He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows^d:” yes; “He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all^e.” To the same effect speak his Apostles also. St. Paul says, that “He who knew no sin was made sin, that is, a sin-offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him^f.” And St. Peter tells us, that “He bore our sins in his own body on the tree,” and “suffered for sins, the just for (in the room of) the unjust^g.” This glorious mystery may be not unfitly illustrated by St. Paul’s conduct towards the penitent Onesimus. Onesimus had robbed his master Philemon. After his conversion by the ministry of Paul, the Apostle sought to restore him to the love and confidence of his master; and engaged for that end to replace from his own funds the money that Onesimus had stolen: “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on

^c Dan. ix. 26.

^d Isai. liii. 4.

^e Isai. liii. 5, 6.

^f 2 Cor. v. 21.

^g 1 Pet. ii. 24. and iii. 18.

mine account: I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it^h." Thus did the Lord Jesus Christ, while yet he was in the bosom of his Father, undertake for us; and thus in due time he "laid down his own life a ransom for us."]

What an instructive mystery is this! We SEE in it,

1. The proper ground for faith—

[To what, or to whom, shall we look to reconcile us to God? Can we "restore what we have taken way?" or will any one else undertake to restore it for us? What compensation can we make for our violations of God's law? What offering can we make, that shall satisfy the claims of divine justice? or what can we do to compensate for the glory of which we have robbed our God? Alas! to make the attempt, or entertain the thought, were vain in the extreme. But Jesus has by his own obedience unto death made full satisfaction for all our sins. Have we poured contempt upon the law? He "has magnified the law, and made it honourableⁱ." Have we brought dishonour on our God? He has glorified every one of the divine perfections more, infinitely more, by his obedience unto death, than they ever could have been glorified either by the perfect obedience, or the eternal condemnation, of the whole human race^k. He then is worthy to be confided in as a Saviour: he is a sure foundation whereon to build all our hopes for time and for eternity. Hence he says, (and may God give to every one of us grace to comply with the invitation!) "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else^l."]

2. The strongest motive for love—

[What shall induce us to love the Saviour, if the contemplation of his vicarious sufferings will not? Can we think of "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich^m;" can we think of this, I say, and not have our souls inflamed with love and gratitude to him? Surely such love must constrain us to admire him, to adore him, to magnify him, to serve him with all our faculties and all our powers. The very stones would cry out against us, if we did not break forth, as it were, in continual hosannas to our adorable Benefactor.]

3. The safest rule for obedience—

[We must expect to be, in a greater or less degree, conformed to our Saviour in his sufferings, if ever we would be conformed to him in his glory. From men we must expect persecutions for his sake. From Satan we shall meet with the

^h Philem. ver. 18, 19.

ⁱ Isai. xlii. 21.

^k John xiii. 31.

^l Isai. xlv. 22.

^m 2 Cor. viii. 9.

same violent assaults. From God himself too must we occasionally experience the hidings of his face, and the chastisements of his rod: for, "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" But in our troubles we must imitate our blessed Lord, and spread them before our heavenly Father "with strong crying and tears." The proper language for us is that which was used by himⁿ — — — And, as far as our afflictions proceed from men, we must meet them with patience and resignation, or rather, I should say, with returns of kindness and love. We should be ready to "restore that which we took not away," and to render good for evil, till we have "overcome evil with good^o." Doubtless this is a difficult and arduous task: but it is one which will be richly recompensed in the performance of it, and will be highly approved of our God in the last day^p. We may indeed, notwithstanding such conduct, be constrained to "pass through deep waters;" but our God will be with us in the midst of them^q, and bring us through all our tribulations to a state of eternal blessedness and glory^r.]

ⁿ ver. 13—18.^o Rom. xii. 20, 21.^p Matt. vi. 14.^q Isai. xliii. 2.^r Rev. vii. 14, 15.

DCXIII.

HUMBLE SOULS ENCOURAGED.

Ps. lxix. 32, 33. *Your heart shall live that seek God. For the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners.*

SWEETLY encouraging are the records of God's people, as contained in the Sacred Oracles. We see their complaints exactly agreeing with those which we ourselves are constrained to utter. We see with what confidence they betook themselves to prayer; and how wonderfully their efforts were crowned with success; and how pleased God himself was with magnifying his grace and mercy towards them: and from all this we derive encouragement, at once suited to our necessities, and sufficient for our wants. Behold the experience of David in the preceding context: "I am poor and sorrowful." (This accords with what is felt by every contrite soul.) And to what has he recourse? To prayer; and with an enlargement of heart which we should scarcely have expected to see: "Let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high!" (It is thus that we also should pray;

not being straitened in our petitions; but “opening our mouths wide, in order that they may be filled.”) And now mark the success of his prayer: behold, without the delay of a moment, he is enabled to add, “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving.” (Such is the success which we also may hope for, if we pray in humility and faith.) And was God displeased with this holy boldness? No: David adds, “This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs,” yea, better than the cattle upon a thousand hills. Now mark the improvement we are to make of this: “The humble shall see this, and be glad: and (whoever ye be) *your* heart shall live that seek God; for the Lord heareth the poor (wherever they may be found), and despiseth not his prisoners,” however low or abject their condition.

Now, to encourage you, my Brethren, from this example, I will proceed (in the simplest way imaginable, and not with any artificial arrangement), to address you on the subject before us.

I trust that many of you are “seeking after God”—

[It can scarcely be, that after having so long had the Gospel faithfully ministered unto you, there should be the same indifference amongst you as in the ignorant ungodly world. I hope and trust there is amongst you some desire after God, some hope in the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, and some endeavour to flee from the wrath to come — —]

And, if you are seeking him aright, God promises that “your heart shall live”—

[Doubtless it is necessary that you seek after God *in earnest*: for “the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent must take it by force.” You may *seek* to enter in, and not be able:” you must therefore not only *seek*, but “*strive*.” Moreover, you must strive *in God’s appointed way*. To win a race, you must not only run, but run lawfully;” that is, agreeably to the laws prescribed for you: and the only way by which any of you can succeed, is, by renouncing all dependence on yourselves, and founding your hopes altogether on the Lord Jesus Christ, even on his meritorious death and passion, as an expiation for your sins — — —

Now, if you are indeed fleeing to him for refuge, you shall assuredly find mercy of the Lord, or, as my text expresses it,

“your heart shall live.” This expression deserves peculiar notice. The heart of an unawakened man is dead, and senseless as the nether millstone. The Gospel, with all its alluring promises, may be proclaimed; but he feels it not: it has no allurements for him; nor do its denunciations of judgment excite alarm. But let a person begin to seek after God aright, and “a new heart will be given to him, and a new spirit be put within him.” “The heart of stone will be taken away, and a heart of flesh” be substituted in its place. Then will all his views, desires, and pursuits, become changed: being alive to God, he will be alive to all holy exercises, and find his happiness in the enjoyment of his God. This is the explanation which the Psalmist himself gives of the expression in another psalm: “They shall *praise the Lord* that seek him; your heart shall live for ever^a.”]

Nor let any one be discouraged on account of his poverty—

[The poor of this world are not less regarded by Jehovah than the rich. And those who are spiritually poor, are objects of his peculiar care. Not one such person will he ever overlook. Though surrounded by myriads of holy angels, he will not suffer them to attract his attention in comparison of a poor and contrite soul. No: “Unto this man will I look,” says he, “even unto him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.” There is not a sigh which such an one utters, but it is heard by him, and is as music in his ears: and every tear he sheds is treasured up by him in his vial. But, not to rest on mere assertions, let us look at an example. In the Prophet Jeremiah, we find a poor mourning penitent, just such an one as we are speaking of; and there we may see in what light he is viewed by God: “I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely, after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.” Now hear what God says to all this: “Is Ephraim (that is, Is *not* Ephraim) my dear Son? Is he not a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: yea, my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord^b.” This shews what favour the poor shall find in his sight; and gives the full explanation of those words, “The Lord heareth the poor.”]

^a Ps. xxii. 26.

^b Jer. xxxi. 18—20.

Even though a person should feel himself like a prisoner under actual sentence of death, let him not despond—

[It is in hell only that men are prisoners of *despair*: whilst they are in this world, the worst amongst them is only a “prisoner of *hope*”; and to such there is a special promise from God himself: “Turn you to the strong-hold, ye prisoners of hope: even to-day do I declare that I will render double unto you^c.” Whatever your deserts of judgment have been, God will award to you a “double” measure in a way of mercy. God even condescends to assume this as his own character, whereby he may be known, even as clearly as by his works of creation, or the dispensations of his providence. “The Lord God is he who made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: who keepeth truth for ever: who executeth judgment for the oppressed; who giveth food to the hungry. *The Lord looseth the prisoners*: the Lord openeth the eyes of the blind: the Lord raiseth up them that are bowed down: the Lord loveth the righteous^d.” To them in a peculiar manner he had respect in the gift of his Son; as our Lord himself has said: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor: he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach *deliverance to the captives*, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord^e.” Only conceive of a poor wretch that has wasted all his substance, and sold himself for a slave, returning in an instant, at the sound of the trumpet, to the enjoyment of liberty, and of all his possessions; and then you have a just view of God’s dealings with the most abject prisoners of hope, the very instant that they call upon him. Let every one, then, take courage, however desperate his state may appear: for this is the true character of Jehovah; and such he will approve himself to be to all who come to him in his Son’s name.]

And now let me ENTREAT you all to seek him without delay—

[“Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.” O beloved Brethren, “seek ye the Lord, while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon^f.”]

^c Zech. ix. 12.

^d Ps. cxlvi. 5—8.

^e Luke iv. 18, 19.

^f Isai. lv. 6, 7.

DCXIV.

THE CHRISTIAN'S FRAME OF MIND.

Ps. lxx. 4, 5. *Let all those that seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee : and let such as love thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified. But I am poor and needy : make haste unto me, O God : Thou art my help and my deliverer : O Lord, make no tarrying.*

THIS psalm is entitled “A psalm to bring to remembrance.” What were the things to which David more especially referred, we do not certainly know. The whole psalm, with only a few verbal alterations, is taken from the 40th Psalm, of which it forms a part ; and it seems to have been separated for the purpose of being used by David on some particular occasion, to which the former part of that psalm was not applicable. It served to bring to his remembrance some special deliverances : and for a similar end it may well be used by us. We have many who would exult in our destruction, even as he had : and we may well desire that all their efforts may be frustrated, and their expectations disappointed. On the other hand, we should desire the prosperity and happiness of the Lord's people : and be earnest with God in prayer, that we ourselves may “participate the felicity of his chosen, and give thanks with his inheritance.” Our past trials and deliverances should all be brought to remembrance for this end ; and be made subservient to our own advancement in the divine life, and to the glory of our God.

From the words before us, I shall,

- I. Point out to your notice that frame of mind which the Lord's people are privileged to enjoy—

Short is the description given of the Lord's people ; but it is amply sufficient to distinguish them from all other people upon earth. “They seek after God, and love his salvation.” The great mass of mankind live without God in the world. And of those who seek him, there are few who “love the salvation” set before us in the Gospel. As for those who seek him in ways of their own devising, they have no claim to

the character of God's people. Those only are truly his, who come to him through Christ, and embrace the salvation offered them in the Gospel, and love that Saviour who has bought them with his blood. To them "Christ is precious;" and their privilege is to live in the daily experience,

1. Of sacred joy—

[Truly they have cause to rejoice. If it were only that they hear of a Saviour, *that* would be ground enough for joy: but to have a view of him in his mediatorial office, and to hope that they have obtained an interest in him, is a reason for "rejoicing in him with joy unspeakable and glorified." Hence the Apostle enjoins it upon us as a duty: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." "Rejoice evermore." It surely does not become a redeemed soul to be cast down with despondency; and still less to be in a state of stupid insensibility. He should be sensible of the mercies vouchsafed unto him, and should "serve his God with gladness and joyfulness of heart."]

2. Of grateful adoration—

[The Christian's joy should not terminate on the benefits he has received, or on his own personal interest in them, so much as on his God and Saviour, from whom he has received them. This distinction I conceive to be of considerable importance: for joy may be excited by novelty, and may be little more than an ebullition of the animal spirits arising from a new hope kindled in the soul: whereas, when it arises rather from a contemplation of the Saviour's love, it is of a more refined quality, more humble, more tender, more modest, more reserved. "The children of Zion should be joyful *in their King*;" and, instead of arrogating any thing to themselves, should say continually, "Let **GOD** be magnified." Such was Mary's joy, when she was honoured to be the means of bringing forth the Saviour of the world: "My soul doth *magnify the Lord*, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." The two kinds of joy, as considered apart, may be compared with fruit in its earlier or its more matured state. The unripe peach, for instance, is brilliant in its hues; but, whilst it is beautiful to the eye, it is crude and sour to the taste: whereas that which is of a more mellowed tint, obscured perhaps by the foliage under which it hangs, will approve itself by its susceptibility of impression from the slightest touch, and the richness of its flavour when submitted to the taste. Such as this latter will be found the joys of heaven. The glorified saints, yea, and the angels too, all fall upon their faces before the throne of God, whilst yet with all their powers they sing

forth the praises “of God and of the Lamb.” They are filled, indeed, with a sense of the benefits which they enjoy: but they are lost in wonder whilst beholding with unveiled face the glories of their God.

Such is the frame which the saints are privileged to enjoy on earth: they should “rejoice and be glad in the Lord;” but at the same time they should be saying continually, “Let God be magnified.”]

But, as all do not live in the enjoyment of this frame, I will,

II. Give some directions to those who have not yet been able to attain it—

We see, from David’s own experience, that this joy is not universal amongst the saints of God. There are times and seasons when, from a variety of causes, the mind of a pious person may be depressed: and when this occurs, I would say to the drooping soul, Follow the example of David in our text:

1. Lie low before God in the deepest humiliation—

“I am poor and needy,” was the confession of that holy man, the man after God’s own heart. And well does the same language become us all. They who know most of themselves, will be the most ready to acknowledge that they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And never are we in a frame more pleasing and acceptable to God, than when we abase ourselves before him in dust and ashes. We are told, that “the broken and contrite heart God will not despise;” nay more, that he will select, for his more immediate and delightful habitation, the humble and contrite soul^a. Then shall we be prepared to exalt our God, when we feel disposed to humble and abase ourselves.]

2. Importune him, with all earnestness, to grant you this frame—

[There is a holy impatience, which God approves; not indeed an impatience connected with murmuring, but that which arises from intensity of desire. This feeling you may carry to its utmost possible extent, “panting after God, even as the hart after the water-brooks.” And under this feeling, you may cry with a boldness almost bordering on presumption, “Return to me, O Lord; make haste unto me: O Lord, make no tarrying.” We may go farther still; and say, with David, “Awake; Why sleepest thou? pluck thy hand out of thy bosom. Arise, and plead thine own cause^b.” Such is the

^a Isai. lvii. 15.

^b Ps. xliv. 23. and lxxiv. 11, 22.

importunity recommended to us in the parable of the unjust judge. The widow, purely by the urgency of her petitions, prevailed over one who cared not either for God or man. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you, that he will avenge them speedily." All who wrestle, like Jacob, in supplication with God, shall assuredly be partakers of his success.]

3. Plead with him your entire dependence on his power and grace—

[“Make haste unto me, O God: *Thou art my help and my deliverer*: O Lord, make no tarrying.” This is a plea which God, if I may so express myself, cannot withstand. If he withhold from us the light of his countenance, it is in order to make us more simple in our dependence on him: and when we renounce every other help or hope, and trust in him with our whole hearts, then are we as sure of succour as if it had already arrived: “for his goings forth are prepared as the morning; and He shall come to us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain upon the earth^c.” “They that trust in the Lord are even as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever^d.”]

APPLICATION—

1. See that the Christian's character, Brethren, be yours—

[Here is an easy test whereby to try yourselves: Are you indeed seeking after God? and are you truly lovers of his salvation? Nothing is easier to ascertain than this. The lovers of pleasure, of riches, and of honour, plainly manifest their character: you may see it in the disposition of their minds, and in the daily habit of their lives. They use the means which are suited to their respective ends. I blame not them for this: for it is not the *pursuit* of earthly things, but the *inordinate* pursuit of them, that is displeasing to God. But where the world is sought only in a legitimate way, the means are used in order to the end: no man expects to reap where he has not sowed. Are you then using the means of salvation, in daily prayer to God, in an earnest application to the Saviour, and in a diligent performance of every known duty? You may easily ascertain your true character, if you will try yourselves by this test: and therefore to every one of you I say, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: try your own selves.”]

2. See that ye walk worthy of that character—

[Be not content to live without a real enjoyment of the divine presence. The lukewarm are in some respects more

^c Hos. vi. 3.

^d Ps. cxxv. 1.

odious to God than those who are altogether destitute of any religion: because, in professing themselves the Lord's people, they bring nothing but disgrace upon him by their want of zeal and love. I say to you, Brethren, and I say it from God himself, "Be either cold or hot." If God be not worthy to be loved and served, cast off his service altogether: but if he be worthy, then love and serve him with your whole hearts. It is in this way only that you can attain any joy in the Lord. It is in this way only that you can gain such discoveries of his love, as shall constrain you to abound in grateful adoration and thanksgiving. In the want of joy, you may indeed be thankful, if you can mourn and weep: but God forbid that you should be satisfied with such low attainments as will leave you destitute of all comfort in religion. You are here to prepare for glory: you are here to anticipate the glory that awaits you: you are here, both in word and deed, to be magnifying the Lord, in some measure as he is magnified in heaven. Aspire, then, to this state, which is recommended in my text: "Let all those that seek the Lord rejoice and be glad in him: and let all such as love his salvation, say continually, The Lord be magnified!"

DCXV.

GOD A HABITATION FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Ps. lxxi. 3. *Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort.*

NO one can enter into the spirit of David's psalms, unless he himself have been sorely persecuted and severely tried. A very great number of the Psalms were written under circumstances of deep affliction; and record either the prayers of David for protection from his enemies, or his thanksgivings for deliverance from them. This psalm was written when David, far advanced in life, was driven from his throne by his son Absalom, and was in the most imminent danger of falling by the hands of his blood-thirsty pursuers. But as in early life, when menaced by Saul, he had besought the Lord, saying, "Bow down thine ear to me; deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me^a;" so now, in nearly the same terms, he repeats the cry: "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be

^a Ps. xxxi. 1, 2.

put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape : incline thine ear to me, and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort^b." Now though, through the goodness of God, we are not brought into such imminent perils as David, yet have we occasion to adopt his language, and to seek in God that protection which no created power can afford.

Let us, in discoursing on his words, consider,

I. The sentiment propounded—

Accustomed as we are to hear the language of the Psalms, we pass by, without any particular notice, expressions which, if duly considered, will appear truly wonderful. How extraordinary is the idea, for instance, of making Jehovah, the Creator of heaven and earth, "our habitation!" Contemplate, I pray you,

1. The condescension of God in suffering himself to be so addressed—

[Consider, for a moment, what a habitation is. Whether it be greater or less in point of magnificence or strength, if it be ours, we have access to it as our own; we gain a ready admission to it at all seasons; we expect to find in it all the accommodations which our necessities require; we regard every chamber of it as destined for our use; we shut the door against every unwelcome intruder; and whatever storms may rage without, we lie down to rest in it, in perfect peace and safety. If we superadd the idea of a fortress, we deride the vain attempts of our enemies, and defy all the power that can be brought against us. Now, think of God as revealing himself to us under such an image; and permitting every sinner in the universe, who will but enter in by Christ as the door, to take to himself this mansion as his own. Truly, if God himself had not authorised such a representation of his character, we should have been ready to denounce it as blasphemy. That the Most High God should give even to the vilest of the human race such intimate access unto himself, seems to be perfectly incredible. Even an earthly monarch could not endure such humiliation as this: and yet the God of heaven and earth feels it to be not unworthy of him. Truly, I say again, this condescension far exceeds all that could ever have entered into the mind of man to conceive, if the voice of inspiration itself

^b ver. 1—3.

had not announced it to us. And this is the very view in which David himself speaks of it in another psalm: "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, my goodness, and my fortress; my high tower and deliverer; my shield, and He in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me. Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him; or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?"^c"]

2. The comfort which man derives from this view of the Deity—

[Every one, the meanest as well as the greatest of men, knows what is comprehended in the idea of a "habitation." It requires no stretch of thought to grasp it: the image is familiar to every mind; and presents itself in all its bearings to every one that has felt the blessings of civilized society. But if we suppose a person to be under the pressure of heavy affliction, whether from the persecutions of men or the assaults of devils, what a comfort must it be to him to contemplate the wisdom, the power, the goodness, the mercy, the love, the faithfulness of Almighty God; and to hear him saying, "Come, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut the doors about thee, and hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast^d!" how joyfully will he "hide himself in the secret of this tabernacle;" and, like the manslayer that has got within the city of his refuge, lift up his soul in adoring gratitude to God, and look with exultation on his disappointed foe!

The more we contemplate the sentiment that is here propounded, the more we shall see occasion to admire the condescension of our God, and to congratulate man upon the high privilege which is thus accorded to him.]

But it is not as an abstract sentiment that this truth is declared: it is embodied in a petition that is presented to God himself: and therefore, to view it aright, we must contemplate,

II. The petition urged—

That it is such a petition as every one will do well to offer, will appear, if we mark,

1. The wisdom of it—

[Every man has enemies to encounter; nor can any one encounter them in his own strength. But we have a vantage ground to which we may repair, a fortress that is absolutely impregnable. In our God we have not only a wall, but "a wall of fire;" which, whilst it protects his people, will devour their assailants. With such a habitation open to us, would

^c Ps. cxliv. 1—3.

^d Isai. xxvi. 20.

it not be madness to neglect it? Should we not rather “resort to it continually,” yea, and abide in it, that we may enjoy the safety which is thus provided for us? If, indeed, there were any other means of safety, an option would be left us: but not all the powers of heaven and earth can save us, if we turn our back on God, to rely upon an arm of flesh. God has said, “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm: but blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is^e.” To every one, therefore, I would say, Flee to your mountain, that the flames overtake you not; and “look not back in all the plain, lest ye be consumed^f.”]

2. The piety of it—

[David renounced every other hope but that which he had in God. Nor, indeed, did he wish for any other; because he saw that God was all-sufficient for him. He saw in God a sufficiency of grace to receive him, of power to protect him, of love to supply his every need; and hence it was that he was emboldened to offer the petition which we are now contemplating. In truth, without such views of God, no one would ever think of addressing him in such terms as these. There must be a just knowledge of God’s character, with suitable affections towards him, else we could never entertain such a desire as is here expressed: it is this apprehension of his excellency that could alone inspire a wish to make him, even his very bosom, our continual resort. But all who have these views of him will unite in that grateful acknowledgment, “Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations^g.”]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet had these views of God—

[Truly, you are greatly to be pitied. For who amongst you can hope to escape all trouble, when it is said that “we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward?” And whither will you go, when enemies assail you? where will you flee for refuge? or in whom will you find the aid which you will stand in need of? Alas! your state, whatever it may now be, will be terrible beyond expression. You will resemble the host of Pharaoh, who found at last that the God with whom they had presumed to contend was mightier than they. On the other hand, “acquaint yourselves with God, and you shall be at peace,” both now and in the eternal world.]

2. Those who have resorted to him under this character—

[Hear what the Psalmist says concerning you: “Because thou hast made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most

^e Jer. xvii. 5—8.

^f Gen. xix. 17.

^g Ps. xc. 1.

High, thy habitation, there shall no evil befall thee^h." Truly, "his name is a strong tower, to which you may run at all times, and be safeⁱ:" and whatever your circumstances may be, "he will be to you as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land^k." Enjoy, then, the exalted privilege which is here vouchsafed unto you. And let there not be a day, or an hour, wherein you do not resort to God under this endearing character, dwelling in him, abiding in him, and finding in him all that your necessities can require.]

^h Ps. xci. 9, 10.

ⁱ Prov. xviii. 10.

^k Isai. xxxii. 2.

DCXVI.

THE KING'S ACCESSION.

Ps. lxxi. 7—9. *I am as a wonder unto many: but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.*

THIS day being called The Jubilee^a, it will be proper to inform you whence that name is given to it. By the Mosaic law, every seventh year was a sabbatical year, or year of rest. At the end of the seventh sabbatical year, that is the 49th, there was a year of universal rest, not to the land only, but to persons of every description: debtors were released, captives liberated, and inheritances restored. This was, as might be expected, a season of peculiar joy. The connexion between that day, and this which we now celebrate, is only in the *time*, the grounds of joy being altogether different. We are called to celebrate the fiftieth year of our Monarch's reign. On this account, I have chosen a subject which I consider as appropriate to the occasion. The psalm before us was written (we apprehend) after Absalom's rebellion. In discoursing on that portion of it which we have read to you, it will be proper,

I. To consider it in reference to David—

Absalom being dead, and the rebellion suppressed, David finds himself firmly seated on his throne; on which occasion,

^a Oct. 25, 1809.

1. He acknowledges the mercies he had received—

[He felt himself most peculiarly circumstanced: his trials had been great, and his deliverances most extraordinary. His hair-breadth escapes from Saul, and afterwards from foreign and domestic enemies, were very numerous — — — He had recently been even driven from his throne by his son Absalom, the partisans of whom were ordered to direct their efforts exclusively against him: yet from this danger also had he been delivered: so that he seemed to all to be under the peculiar protection of Heaven. His mind too had in all these trials been wonderfully preserved from any thing vindictive, or unworthy of his high character. On all these accounts he was “a wonder unto many.”]

There was indeed a reason for these mercies, which his enemies had no idea of: “he had made God his refuge.” When persecuted by men, he betook himself to prayer, and “encouraged himself in God.” Thus, under all circumstances, he had “God for his glory and defence.”]

2. He makes a suitable improvement of them—

[*He renders thanks to God for his past favours.*—In this the Psalmist was so exemplary, that he seems frequently to breathe almost the very language of heaven itself — — — In this too he is distinguished from almost all other saints: others abound in prayer, but he in praise — — —]

He next prays for a continuance of these favours.—He well knew that he could no longer be safe than whilst he was under the care of the Almighty; and that now in his advanced age he needed, if possible, more than ever the guidance and protection of Heaven — — — Hence he prayed that God would “not cast him off in his old age, nor forsake him when his strength failed him.”]

Such is the import of the passage. Let us now,

II. Accommodate it to the circumstances of this day—

Well may we at this time acknowledge the mercies of God to us—

[Our king may truly be said to be “a wonder unto many,” whether we consider the *length*, or the *prosperity*, of his reign. Twice only, within the space of a thousand years, has any monarch of ours reigned so long as to see a jubilee kept on his account. And if we consider the state of the world, it is truly wonderful, that, after so many difficulties as we have encountered, we should stand so eminent among the nations. Some indeed are fond of representing us as in a distressed and fallen state. But let such persons compare us with all the other nations of Europe, and they will see, that, whilst all of them have fallen a sacrifice to the politics or arms of France,

we are as rich and potent as at any period of our history. That we have burthens to bear, is certain: but it is very unfair to ascribe them to our governors. They have arisen out of the circumstances of the world around us; in which we were of necessity involved; and from which we could no more disengage ourselves, than we could exempt our nation from the physical motion of the globe.]

We should also make a similar improvement of them—

[*Many are the grounds which we have for praise and thanksgiving:* and our mouths may well “be filled with God’s praise all the day.” On this day especially we are called to manifest our gratitude both in a way of spiritual, and, if I may so speak, of carnal joy. Some, in their zeal for spiritual joy, forget that we consist of body as well as of a spiritual part; and that in the Scriptures we have numerous instances of national gratitude expressed by the combined exercise of spiritual and carnal joy. Such was that holy feast which David himself, together with his people, kept, not long after he had written this psalm^b. And it is truly gratifying to think, that, through the benevolence of the rich, all the poorer classes of society are enabled to participate, in a more than ordinary measure, the bounties of Providence, and to share in the general joy.

Yet have we also peculiar need of prayer.—At this moment our enemy is disengaged from other contests, and enabled to direct all his force against us. Our own government also is unhappily disunited, and our aged king begins to find “his strength fail him.” What, in such a state, shall we do, if God forsake us? We have need to pray unto him “not to cast us off.” Our prosperity hitherto has doubtless been in a great measure owing to this, that we “have made God our refuge.” Both king and people, when compared with other nations, have been exemplary in this. Let us continue to seek Him more and more: and then, whatever be our state on earth, we shall keep an eternal jubilee in heaven.]

^b 1 Chron. xxix. 20—22.

DCXVII.

SALVATION A GROUND OF JOY.

Ps. lxxi. 15. *My mouth shall shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof.*

PERHAPS, of all mankind, no one person ever experienced more signal deliverances than David. In his early life he was exposed to the most imminent

dangers from Saul. During his whole reign he was engaged in almost one continual scene of warfare : and in his old age, his own son Absalom conspired against him, and sought his life. It was on this last occasion that he penned this psalm ; and gave it to the Church, as a memorial of God's unbounded mercy and faithfulness towards him.

The spirit which he breathes in the words before us shews,

I. What should be the subjects of our daily contemplation—

We, like David, have numberless mercies to acknowledge at God's hands. Could we but see one half of the deliverances we have received, we should be perfectly overwhelmed with wonder and astonishment. From our youth up, even to the present moment, his care of us has been unintermitted, and his interpositions truly wonderful. But still greater has been his care for our souls. Behold the "salvation" he has revealed to us : truly, we "cannot know the numbers thereof." Behold, I say,

1. How inestimable are its blessings !

[Who can ever declare the value of pardon or peace, or holiness or glory ? Go down to the dread abodes of hell, and see the misery of unpardoned sin : or go up to the regions of bliss in heaven, and see the joys that are at God's right hand for evermore : or take the state of God's people here on earth ; and contrast the liberty enjoyed by his children with the bondage endured by the slaves of Satan ; and you will see what unspeakable obligations we owe to God for his converting and saving grace.]

2. How incalculable the price paid for them !

[Truly, "it is not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, that we have been redeemed, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot^a." In comparison of this, ten thousand worlds would have been a worthless sacrifice. How inconceivable the cost ! Truly, "We know not the numbers thereof ;" nor could all the angels in heaven count the mighty sum.]

3. How unsearchable the grace displayed in them !

^a 1 Pet. i. 19.

[All of them are the fruits of sovereign grace; and all are bestowed on the very chief of sinners; yea, and bestowed, not only unmerited by us, but unsought and unsolicited. In the first instance, they were given to man when he was risen up in rebellion against his Maker: and even still are they conferred on men, “not according to their works, but according to God’s purpose and grace, which he purposed from all eternity in Christ Jesus” our Lord^b.]

Let us, then, consider,

II. What should be the frame of our minds in relation to them?

Our determination should resemble that of David: “Our mouth should shew forth this salvation from day to day”—

1. In grateful acknowledgments to God—

[It seems really wonderful, that men so indebted to their God should be able to find time for any thing but praise. David in his Psalms, sets us a good example: “I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever^c.” Let us only learn to appreciate aright the mercies we have received, and there will be no bounds to our gratitude, no end to our praise.]

2. In affectionate commendations to men—

[David desired to make known to others the goodness of his God. In the psalm just cited, hear how he dilates upon this subject: “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works: and men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts; and I will declare thy greatness ——— They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of thy kingdom^d.” And what other subject of conversation can we ever find so interesting, so useful, so worthy of a rational being, and, above all, so suitable to a redeemed soul?]

BEHOLD, then,

1. What glorious subjects have ministers to proclaim!

[The Apostles “preached to men the unsearchable riches of Christ^e.” And so filled with this subject was the Apostle Paul, that “he determined to know nothing among his people but Jesus Christ, and him crucified^f.” This is a subject utterly

^b 2 Tim. i. 9.

^c ver. 8. with Ps. cxlv. 1, 2.

^d ver. 24. with Ps. cxlv. 5, 6, 11, 12. See also Ps. xl. 9, 10.

^e Eph. iii. 8.

^f 1 Cor. ii. 2.

inexhaustible: in it "are contained all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge^g." O, that every minister would bring it forth to his people! Surely his hearers should soon be enriched; for it cannot be that the Saviour should ever be exhibited in vain, and his salvation be offered unto men in vain. But,]

2. How unlike to David are the generality of men!

[David would think and speak of nothing else but God's righteousness and salvation; but the generality of men scarcely ever speak or think of it at all. Indeed, this is the one subject which, beyond all others, is, as it were, by universal consent, proscribed: so that we may mix in company for years and scores of years, and never once hear it brought forward in the way that David and the Apostles spake of it. And even good men are too little impressed with it, either in their conversations with men, or in their secret addresses at the Throne of Grace. Mark the frame of your minds, Brethren, from day to day, and see whether you have not reason to blush and be ashamed for the little impression which this subject makes upon your minds. But as for the world at large, if any thing under heaven can shew them how far they are from God, methinks they must see it by comparing their experience with that of David in our text.]

3. What a resemblance to heaven is the saint's life on earth!

[Let us suppose a saint resembling David, and uttering from his inmost soul the expressions in my text; and you will immediately be reminded of the heavenly host, who "rest not day and night," ascribing, without a moment's intermission, and with all the powers they possess, "salvation to God and to the Lamb." Take this view, then, of real piety, and seek, my Brethren, to begin your heaven upon earth.] -

^g Col. ii. 3.

DCXVIII.

EXCELLENCE OF CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT.

Ps. lxxii. 6—11. *He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him, and his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the Isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba*

shall offer gifts: yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him.

THE priesthood of Christ is that to which our attention is principally called in the New Testament; the Epistle to the Hebrews being almost exclusively written upon that subject: but in the Old Testament there seems to be a far more studied exhibition of his kingly office. The whole Levitical law indeed *typically* displayed his priestly character: but the Prophets continually, *in the most express terms*, declared, that the person, who was to be “a child born and a son given,” should have “the government upon his shoulder^a,” and that an universal and everlasting dominion should be committed to him^b. The psalm before us is altogether occupied in describing the nature of his government, and the blessings which should result from it. There was doubtless some reference to Solomon, who was the first of the Israelites that was both “a king, and a king’s son^c:” but the language in many parts cannot with any truth or propriety be applied to him: it can relate to none but Him who was greater than Solomon, even to the Messiah, whose glory no words can adequately describe.

The sublime passage which we have selected for our meditation at this time, will lead us to shew,

I. The nature of Christ’s government—

It has generally happened, that those whose power has been most absolute have been most tyrannical in their use of it; and that they have sought rather the aggrandizement of themselves than the good of their subjects. But the administration of Christ, like the influence of the heavens, is,

1. Gently operative—

[“The showers gently descending on the parched ground, or the new-mown grass,” insinuate themselves in a silent and imperceptible manner to the roots, and cause the suspended powers of vegetation to exert themselves with renewed vigour. It is thus that Christ, by his word and Spirit, renovates the soul. He comes not with the sanctions of the law, which, like

^a Isai. ix. 6, 7.

^b Dan. vii. 13, 14.

^c ver. 1.

an impetuous torrent or a desolating tempest, spread terror and dismay: he descends to us rather in mild invitations and gracious promises, which, through the effectual influences of his Spirit, penetrate the recesses of the heart, and give life and vigour to the whole man. When once we are *cut down*, as it were, and made to feel our need of him, then he pours upon us the riches of his grace, to soften the hardness of our hearts, and to invigorate the withered faculties of our souls. As it was not by "the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, that God wrought upon Elijah, but by the still small voice," at the sound of which the prophet "wrapped his face in his mantle^d;" so it is with respect to the secret visits of our Lord. When he is pleased to speak to us in the mild accents of his love, *then* the heart is dissolved in tenderness and contrition, or sweetly elevated in devout and grateful adorations.]

2. Richly productive—

[The sickly plants, when watered, raise up their drooping heads, and bring forth, each according to its nature, their proper fruits. Thus, in the day of Christ's descent upon the souls of the "righteous, they flourish:" and "peace," the first-fruit of the Spirit, "abounds within them." The image in the text beautifully represents the change which is produced, when "a season of refreshing comes from the presence of the Lord:" the person thus highly favoured "flourishes" like the palm-tree; he becomes as "a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth fruit in his season: his leaf does not wither; and whatsoever he doeth, it prospers^e." If the sun of persecution arise upon him, it does not now scorch him and destroy his root^f, but rather calls into activity his vital energies; and serves only to display with fuller evidence the communications he has received from heaven. Nothing now robs him of his peace. Much as he laments his former iniquities, they no longer disturb his peace, because the guilt of them is washed away in "the fountain opened for sin." Nor does the prospect of death and judgment appal him, because "he knows in whom he has believed," and that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." His rapturous joys may intermit and subside, but his peace shall continue "as long as the moon endureth."]

A due consideration of these things will lead us to rejoice in,

II. The extent of his dominion—

Earthly monarchs have vainly imagined themselves

^d 1 Kings xix. 11—13. ^e Ps. xcii. 12, 13. and i. 3.

^f Matt. xiii. 6, 21. with Jer. xvii. 8. and Hos. xiv. 5—7.

possessed of universal empire: but it is to Christ alone that this truly and properly belongs. His dominion extends itself over,

1. The most distant places—

[Solomon's empire was the most extensive of any that was governed by Jewish kings. It reached from the river Euphrates to the Red Sea; and comprehended all the countries between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean: "it was from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth." But Christ has literally "the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." His kingdom was speedily erected in every part of the known world: and at this moment there are multitudes in every civilized nation under heaven, yea, amongst barbarians also and savages, who acknowledge him as their supreme Governor, and render the most cheerful obedience to his commands. Already is that prophecy fulfilled, "From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and *in every place* incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering^g." In this therefore we have a pledge that the knowledge of him "shall yet more extensively prevail, and shall one day cover the earth as the waters cover the sea^h."]]

2. The most exalted personages—

[It was said of Solomon, in reference to the fore-mentioned countries, that "all the kings of the earth sought his presence, and brought presents to him; and that he reigned over themⁱ." Nominally too, a great multitude of kings are subject unto Christ: but, alas! his real subjects have hitherto been few among them. What Paul complained of in his time has been verified in all succeeding ages to the present day; "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called^k." But the time is coming when the most potent monarchs upon earth shall become his willing subjects, and "bow down themselves, and lick the dust before him," in a humble acknowledgment of their entire dependence on him, and of their unreserved devotion to his will^l. "He is Lord of lords, and King of kings:" and if any will not bend to the sceptre of his grace, they shall be broken in pieces with a rod of iron^m.]

INFER—

^g Mal. i. 11.

^h Isai. xi. 9. and Zech. xiv. 9.

ⁱ 2 Chron. ix. 23, 24, 26.

^k 1 Cor. i. 26.

^l This seems to be the true meaning of "*licking the dust*." Compare Isai. xlix. 23.

^m Ps. ii. 9.

1. The folly of refusing submission to him—

[The word of Jehovah is pledged, that “the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christⁿ:” yea, the Lord Jesus Christ himself hath “sworn, that unto him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear^o.” To what purpose then shall we hold out against him, when we know what must infallibly be the issue of the contest? He has told us what he will say to his attendants in the last day; “Bring hither those that were mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me^p.” Let us then “be wise” in time: let us “kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and we perish^q.”]

2. The blessedness of being his faithful subjects—

[It is a rich blessing to live under a mild and equitable government. But no earthly monarch, however well disposed, can render his subjects happy, like the adorable Jesus. He gives us access to him all times, and sheds forth upon us his benign influences, whereby our spirits are revived, and our souls strengthened. What Solomon speaks figuratively in reference to earthly kings, is literally true with respect to him; “In the light of the King’s countenance is life; and his favour is like a cloud of the latter rain^r.” “Happy then art thou, O Israel! Who is like unto thee^s?” “Let Israel rejoice in Him that made him, and redeemed him; and let the children of Zion be joyful in their King^t.”]

3. What encouragement we have to exert ourselves for the diffusion of the Gospel throughout the world.

[If we look at the state of the world, or at the weakness of the instruments which we employ, we shall despair of producing any great effects. But we have nothing to fear. God has spoken; and he will do it. Who that sees the effect of the sun and showers upon the earth, and the rapid change which takes place, from the desolations of winter to the verdure of the spring and the fruits of autumn, can doubt the power of the Redeemer’s grace to convert and sanctify all the nations of the world? It shall be done; and perhaps, notwithstanding the present unfavourable appearances, the time for it is not so distant as we may imagine. What has already been effected towards it, has been wrought through the instrumentality of a few ignorant or hostile men; so, in like manner, though there were none amongst us who were not ignorant as the Galilean fishermen, or hostile as Saul, the grace of Christ shall be

ⁿ Rev. xi. 15.^o Isai. xlv. 23.^p Luke xix. 27.^q Ps. ii. 10—12.^r Prov. xvi. 15.^s Deut. xxxiii. 29.^t Ps. cxlix. 2.

sufficient, both to raise up instruments and to bless their endeavours. I call upon all of you, then, according to your ability, to be fellow-workers with Christ in this good work, assured, that the events predicted in my text shall certainly be accomplished in God's appointed time; and that our efforts, whether effectual or not for the end proposed, shall be accepted and recompensed by him, whom we serve, and whose empire we labour to establish^u.]

^u For a *Mission Sermon*, either to *Jews* or *Gentiles*.

DCXIX.

CHRIST'S GOVERNMENT OF HIS CHURCH.

Ps. lxxii. 12—15. *He shall deliver the needy, when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: and precious shall their blood be in his sight. And he shall live; and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba: prayer also shall be made for him continually; and daily shall he be praised.*

THE science of Government is at all times interesting to the human mind. Respecting the different *forms* of Government, there must of necessity be a great diversity of opinion; but respecting the *ends* of it there can be but one sentiment in every bosom. The one concern of those in authority should be to promote to the utmost possible extent the welfare and happiness of all who are committed to their charge: and in proportion as this object is pursued, must the existence of Government and the exercise of legitimate authority be numbered amongst the richest blessings bestowed upon mankind. It was from a conviction of this truth that the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice^a." Perhaps in no country, at any period of the world, were these ends of Govern-

^a 1 Kings x. 8, 9.

ment so extensively attained as in Israel, under the reign of Solomon. It is in praise of his administration that the psalm before us was penned. Yet are there parts of the psalm which clearly shew that the inspired penman had respect to a greater King than Solomon, even to "Messiah the Prince," the "King of kings, and Lord of lords." The reference of the psalm to Him being universally acknowledged, we will draw your attention to the two points which are unfolded in our text ; namely,

I. The interest which Christ takes in his people—

The description here given of his people deserves especial notice—

[In the former part of the psalm, they are repeatedly characterized as *poor and needy*. "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy *poor* with judgment. He shall judge *the poor* of the people, he shall save the children of *the needy*, and shall break in pieces the oppressor^b." In the text itself this description is given of them even to tautology: "He shall deliver *the needy* when he crieth, *the poor* also, and *him that hath no helper*. He shall spare *the poor and needy*, and shall save the souls of *the needy*." We are not to understand, from hence, that he reigns over no other; though it is certain that over *them chiefly* he has reigned hitherto^c: but, as his reign is *spiritual*, so it is in a *spiritual view* that his subjects are here described; and, truly, to this description do they all answer: and it is an unspeakable comfort to them that they are so described; for, if they had been designated by any nobler title, thousands of them would have doubted whether they might dare to number themselves amongst his subjects: but, under the character of the poor and needy, the very least, as well as the greatest of his subjects, can confidently assert their claim to that honour — — —

It is here taken for granted, too, that his people will be exposed to heavy trials from an oppressive and ungodly world. And because the violence of persecution has in great measure ceased in the present day, we are ready to imagine the disposition to oppress them has ceased. But this is by no means the case. The laws of the land protect the godly from that measure of persecution which at different times and under different pretences has raged against them: but the contempt in which the saints are held, *solely and entirely on the ground of their sanctity*, clearly shews that the enmity against them has not ceased, but is only restrained by legal enactments, and

^b ver. 2, 4.

^c 1 Cor. i. 26. Jam. ii. 5.

a more general diffusion of civil and religious liberty. It is still as true as at any period of the world, that “if we were of the world, the world would love its own; but because we are not of the world, but Christ has chosen us out of the world, therefore the world hateth us^d.”]

But Jesus will suit his ministration to their necessities—

[If he suffer them to be oppressed for a while, it is only that he may the more visibly and acceptably exert himself in their behalf. Let them only “cry” unto him, and he will shew himself strong in their behalf, and mighty to save. There are but two ways in which any one can gain an unjust dominion over his people; namely, by fraudulent enticement, or by overpowering force. But, though both of these be combined for the bringing of them into bondage, he will interpose for them, and “redeem them both from deceit and violence:” or, if he should permit an oppressor so far to prevail over them as to take away their life, he will vindicate their cause, and make their enemy to feel that “precious is their blood in his sight.” But over “their souls” shall none prevail. Not even their great adversary, though as a subtle serpent he put forth all his devices to beguile them^e, or as a roaring lion he make his utmost efforts to devour them^f, he shall not be able; for Jesus will effectually preserve them, and not suffer so much as “one of them to be plucked out of his hand^g.” As it is his Father’s will, so also is it his, that not one of his little ones should perish^h. As for their poverty and helplessness, this shall operate with him rather as an inducement to afford them his succour, than as an obstacle to his gracious interference: indeed, the more they feel their utter dependence upon him, the more readily and effectually will he exert himself in their behalfⁱ.]

Nor shall they be insensible of his kindness towards them: for the text informs us of,

II. The interest which his people take in him—

In the life of such a king as Solomon, the whole nation is deeply interested. But he, however long he reign, must die at last: but the King of Zion shall live for ever. “He was indeed crucified through weakness; but he liveth by the power of God^k,” yea, “he is alive for evermore^l.”

^d John xv. 19.

^e 2 Cor. xi. 3.

^f 1 Pet. v. 8.

^g John x. 28.

^h Luke xii. 32.

ⁱ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

^k 2 Cor. xiii. 4.

^l Rev. i. 18.

Now, as in earthly governments the people pay tribute to their king, and pray for the prosperity of his kingdom, and take all suitable occasions for displaying their loyalty, whether in a way of private commendation or public address; so the subjects of King Messiah approve themselves worthy of the relation in which they stand to him.

1. They pay him their tribute—

["The silver and the gold are his:" and though he is able to carry on the affairs of his government without any contribution from man, yet he is pleased to make use of human instruments, and to give his people an opportunity of manifesting their zeal in his service: hence they bring him their willing offerings. As, at his first appearance in the world, the wise men presented to him gold and frankincense and myrrh; so now it is the joy of all his people to contribute, according to their power, to the enlargement and establishment of his kingdom. Gladly do they "give him of the gold of Sheba;" and account it all as of no value, except as it is employed in subserviency to his will, and for the advancement of his glory. The very widow accounts it her honour and her happiness to cast her mite into his treasury; and he accepts it with the same pleasure as the richest contributions of the great and wealthy.]

2. They offer their prayers in his behalf—

[*Personally*, he needs them not. In this respect he is unlike the kings of the earth. But for the prosperity of his kingdom he enjoins us to pray. One of the first petitions which, in his short and comprehensive prayer, he has taught us to pour forth, is, "Thy kingdom come." In this sense, "prayer is made for him continually," by every subject of his kingdom. It is a grief to his people to see so great a part of the world still ignorant of him, and persisting in a rejection of his light and easy yoke; and they long to behold both Jews and Gentiles prostrate at his feet. "They rest not day or night" in calling upon God to take to him his great power and reign among them; yea, they give him no rest, till he shall arise and "subdue all nations to the obedience of faith^m."]

3. They render unto him their devoutest acknowledgments—

[A grateful people cannot but acknowledge with gratitude the blessings which they enjoy under the paternal government of a wise and pious king. But, great as earthly benefits

^m Isai. lxii. 6, 7.

are, they are not to be compared with those which we receive under the government of the Lord Jesus. What protection from enemies, what peaceful quiet, what abundance of all spiritual blessings does the very least and meanest of his subjects enjoy! enjoy, too, as the very result of his care over them, and of his bounty towards them. An earthly prince, however ardent his desires or laborious his efforts, could not drive away distress from his dominions; nor, if it were possible for his subjects, all of them without exception, to have access to him, could he administer to them the relief which they solicited. But Jesus is accessible at all times to every creature in his vast empire; and can both listen to their requests without weariness, and fulfil them without delay. This, too, is a truth, of which every individual among them is sensible; all of them having been deeply oppressed with want, and having carried to him their respective trials, and having received relief at his hands. Every one of them, therefore, "praises him daily," as the one author of all his blessings, and the one ground of all his hopesⁿ.]

Such, then, being the mutual regard subsisting between the Lord Jesus Christ and his people, let me, in CONCLUSION, call you to contemplate,

1. The folly of casting off his yoke—

[He has ascended up on high^o, and is set down on the right hand of God, until all his enemies shall become his footstool^p. And do you suppose that any will be able successfully to hold out against him? No: his arrows shall be very sharp in the hearts of all his enemies; and the stoutest of them all shall lick the dust: yea, "all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him^q." Let none of you, then, continue in your stoutness of heart; but cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and implore mercy at his hands. Then shall you find, that in the mercy which he exercises, no less than in the justice he administers, "your blood shall be precious in his sight."]

2. The happiness of his faithful subjects—

[This were great, if we considered only what is spoken respecting them in the text. But their happiness infinitely transcends any thing that earthly monarchs are able to bestow.

ⁿ See this done first in general terms, Ps. cxlv. 1—13; and then, for his more particular acts of grace, Ps. cxlv. 14—21, and Ps. cxlvi. 1, 2, 7—10.

^o If this be a subject for the ASCENSION DAY, or the SUNDAY AFTER, this hint may be a little amplified.

^p Ps. cx. 1.

^q ver. 11.

They are themselves, all of them without exception, made kings, and have a kingdom given unto them by their Lord, similar to that which has been conferred on the Messiah himself by his heavenly Father^r. Hear ye this, ye poor and needy souls! Are ye not amazed, that ye should be “taken, as it were, from a dunghill, and set among princes, and made to inherit a throne of glory^s?” Yet be assured, that this is your portion, if only you approve yourselves faithful to your Lord and King. Yes: “be ye faithful unto death, and you shall, every one of you, inherit a crown of life.”]

^r Rev. iii. 21.

^s 1 Sam. ii. 8.

DCXX.

THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL.

Ps. lxxii. 16. *There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.*

IN many parts of Scripture the typical sense is more manifest than the literal. It is so in the psalm before us. This psalm is a description of the reign of Solomon, who was the first of the “kings” that was also a “king’s son.” The extent, duration, and happiness of his government are predicted by David his father. But a greater than Solomon is here. There can be no doubt but that the glory of the Messiah’s kingdom is here described. The extent of that is unbounded, and the blessedness of it is eternal. The words of the text, according to their *literal* meaning, declare the fruitfulness of the land, and the increase of population in the days of Solomon; but they *typically* represent the spread of the Gospel under the Christian dispensation, and the multitudes of converts that shall become the subjects of Messiah’s kingdom. They naturally lead us to consider,
I. The representation here given of the preached Gospel—

The Gospel is compared to seed cast upon the earth—

[This is a frequent comparison in the Scriptures; nor can any other be more just. The seed is that from which the whole

harvest springs. Weeds will grow of themselves, but corn requires culture; nor can any harvest be expected but in consequence of a patient and laborious attention to the duties of husbandry. Thus it is also with the Gospel. That is the seed from which alone any fruit will arise to God. Men will bring forth all manner of evil fruits without any instruction or advice. But never will they abound in fruits of righteousness unless the seed of divine truth be first sown in their hearts.]

The place whereon this seed is cast is like "the tops of mountains"—

[Vallies are fruitful; but mountains, and especially the mountain-tops, are barren. They rarely have any soil; nor, if they had, would they be proper situations for the sowing of corn. Were any corn to spring up upon them, the storms and tempests would destroy it long before it could arrive at maturity. Such is the world at large, and the heart of every individual in it, barren in itself, and exposed to storms of passion and floods of temptation. And most discouraging is the prospect of that labourer who goes forth to sow his corn in such a soil.

Moreover the mountain-tops were the places where the idols of the heathen deities were worshipped^a. Thus were they the seat of all superstition and idolatry. What a view does this give us of the place where the Gospel seed is sown! Yet, alas! it is but too just a representation both of the world, and of the heart of man. Superstition and idolatry abound in every place and every heart. What seed then can be expected ever to flourish in so foul a soil?]

Nor is there more than a mere "handful" of corn sown there—

[If the seed were multiplied in proportion to the badness of the soil, there might still be some little hope of a harvest. But of what use is a mere handful of corn when cast on a surface of such vast extent? What hope could there be that the whole world should be evangelized by twelve poor fishermen? Even at this time, how wide the field, and how few the labourers! Millions of our fellow-creatures never so much as hear the name of Christ; and of those who do, there are, alas! too many who never have the whole counsel of God declared unto them.]

But notwithstanding these discouragements we shall not despair of the success of the Gospel, if we consider,

^a In reference to this custom, the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the triumph of the Gospel over all false religions, says, "The mountain of the Lord's House shall be established *on the top of the mountains.*"

II. The blessing which God has promised to it—

The prophecy before us declares that the increase of this seed shall be,

1. Strong—

[The woods of “Lebanon” were proverbially grand. Waving their lofty heads, they seemed to defy the storms and tempests. Such was to be the fruit that should spring from the Gospel seed. Weak as corn is to withstand a storm, *that* which was to grow upon the mountain-tops should be firm as the deep-rooted cedars. And has not the event justified the prediction? The powers of earth and hell combined against the infant church, but were not able to crush it. Neither imprisonment nor death could intimidate the disciples of Jesus. Even the weaker sex were enabled to endure the most cruel tortures, and to glory in their tribulations for Jesus’ sake. In every successive age the same holy fortitude has characterized the followers of the Lamb. If any through the fear of man have forsaken the Church, they have only proved thereby that they never truly belonged to it; “they went out from us because they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us^b.” Every true believer has been faithful unto death.]

2. Numerous—

[What more numerous than the piles of grass? Yet such, it was foretold, should be the converts to Christianity. And how was this verified *in the apostolic age*? Thousands were converted by one single sermon. In a few years the followers of Christ filled, not Judea alone, but also the whole Roman empire. *At the reformation* too the seed that had long lain under the earth, sprang up and yielded a glorious harvest. But the promised period is yet future, though, we hope, it is hastening on apace. *In the latter day* “the people of God shall be as the stars of heaven for multitude”. “A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation^c”. Yea, “a nation shall be born in a day”. And “All the ends of the earth shall remember themselves and turn unto the Lord^d”. There still indeed may be seasons when, as in former ages, they shall be mown down by their persecutors; but they shall spring up again like the grass: and the very blood of the martyrs shall be the seed of the church. “The knowledge of the Lord shall surely cover the earth as the waters cover the sea^e”.]

This SUBJECT may well excite in us,

1. Thankfulness for what is past—

^b 1 John ii. 19. ^c Isai. lx. 22. ^d Ps. xxii. 27. ^e Hab. ii. 14.

[What a mercy is it, that, when only a handful of corn is sown on the earth, some grains of it should fall on this barren spot! And what a signal mercy if it have sprung up in *our* hearts! And have we not reason to hope that this is indeed the case? If we cannot boast of multitudes like the piles of grass, are there not sufficient to shew the virtue of the Gospel-seed, and the blessing of God upon the sowing of it? Have not some attained a height and stability, and maintained their steadfastness against the united assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil? Let us then rejoice and be thankful to God for such distinguished blessings. And let us still shew ourselves to have been “planted in the house of the Lord by flourishing in the courts of our God.”]

2. Hope respecting the future—

[The promise of God is sure, and shall be fulfilled in its season. We cannot but grieve when we see the barrenness of the field, and fewness of faithful labourers. But there is nothing impossible with God. He can send forth labourers into his harvest, and give the most abundant success to the seed sown. Yea, he can overrule the most adverse circumstances for the manifestation of his own glory. Let us wait upon him then in prayer, and cry from our inmost souls, “Thy kingdom come.” Let us beg, “That the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified” throughout the world^f. And let us look forward in certain expectation, that the “grain of mustard-seed shall become a great tree^g,” and that in due time “All shall know the Lord from the least to the greatest^h.”]

^f 2 Thess. iii. 1.

^g Matt. xiii. 32.

^h Jer. xxxi. 34.

DCXXI.

THE PERPETUITY AND EXCELLENCY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

Ps. lxxii. 17. *His name shall endure for ever : his name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed.*

NONE of the Prophets, except Isaiah, have written so copiously and so plainly respecting Christ as David. His prophecies are very frequently referred to in the New Testament; and their accomplishment in Jesus is frequently asserted, incontestably proved, and copiously illustrated. The psalm before us was most probably the last that David penned. It was written at the close of his life, on occasion of Solomon's coronation. The dying monarch hearing that

his son Adonijah had usurped his throne, gave immediate orders that Solomon should be anointed with the holy oil, and placed upon the throne, and be proclaimed king throughout all his dominions; that by this means his oath to Bathsheba, respecting the succession of Solomon, might be fulfilled, and the nation be rescued from the calamities in which a disputed succession might involve it^a. The psalm begins with a prayer for Solomon, and proceeds to foretell the peace, glory, extent, duration, and happiness of his government. But beyond, a doubt, a greater than Solomon is here: the Messiah himself is manifestly referred to; and the words of our text must be considered as describing *his* kingdom:

I. Its perpetuity—

[The names, not of the Jewish monarchs only, but also of many heroes of antiquity, have been handed down to us, and probably will be transmitted to the latest generations. But there are several points of view in which the remembrance of Jesus' name differs widely from that of any other person whatever.

It is transmitted to us in a way of filiation.—Other names come down to us by means of historic records: but that of our blessed Lord “is continued,” or propagated (as the word means) in the same way as the name of a father is continued in his children. Children were born to him by the preaching of his Gospel; and, after him, were called Christians: from that period, others have risen up, in constant succession, to perpetuate his name: nor shall the line ever be broken: “instead of the fathers there shall be children, who shall make his name to be remembered in all generations^b.”

It is heard with the same regard that it ever was.—There was a time when the name of Cæsar or of Alexander made whole nations tremble: but who fears them now? What is their love or their hatred unto us? What is Solomon himself to us? We admire his character; but for his person we have no regard. But it is not thus with the sacred name of JESUS. We tremble at it with a holy awe; we love it, as expressing all that is amiable and endearing. We dread his displeasure above all things, and covet his favour more than life itself. And as long as the sun shall continue its course, so long shall the name of Jesus be venerated and adored.

It “endures” in spite of all the endeavours that have been

^a 1 Kings i. 33—35.

^b Ps. xlv. 16, 17. and cxlv. 4—6.

made to blot out the remembrance of it from under heaven.—

No sooner was the name of Jesus exalted by the preaching of the Apostles, than the rulers exerted all their power to suppress it: they beat and imprisoned the preachers, and menaced them with yet severer punishment, if they should presume to speak any more in his name^c. Thus also, in all subsequent ages, “the potentates of the earth have taken counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us^d.” What name, like that of Jesus, is proscribed at this day? We may descant upon the virtues of ancient sages; and the more light we can throw upon their characters, the more acceptable we shall be in every company: but let us speak of Jesus, let us set forth his transcendent excellencies, and expatiate upon all the wonders of his love, and we shall excite in our hearers nothing but disgust. But has this confederacy prevailed to banish his name? No; rather, “the more his people have been afflicted, the more they have grown and multiplied:” and however earth and hell may combine their efforts to efface his memory, or diminish his influence, “He who sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them, and have them in derision^e.”]

II. Its excellency—

[The administration of Solomon was attended with great benefit to his people: and such a king as he must be considered as a rich blessing to any nation. But there are many benefits which it is not in the power of any king to communicate. What can a creature do to mitigate our pains, or to rescue us from the dominion of unbridled lusts? It is otherwise with the Lord Jesus: he can impart to his subjects whatever blessings they need, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity. Do we desire the pardon of our sins? We may be “justified freely through his blood^f.” Do we long for peace of conscience? He has left it to his subjects as a legacy^g, and gives them “a peace which passeth all understanding^h.” Do we stand in need of strength? “Through him we shall be enabled to do all thingsⁱ.” Do we extend our desires to all the glory of heaven? “In him we may be saved with an everlasting salvation^k.” It is not sufficient to say that the subjects of Christ’s kingdom *may* be thus blessed; for they actually *are* so: there is not one in all his dominions who is not thus highly favoured. If we consult the prophets, they declare this uniformly; and represent them all as saying, “In the Lord have I righteousness

^c Acts iv. 17, 18. and v. 28, 40.

^e Ps. ii. 4.

^h Phil. iv. 7.

^f Rom. v. 9.

ⁱ Phil. iv. 13.

^d Ps. ii. 2.

^g John xiv. 27.

^k Isai. xlv. 17.

and strength¹." If we consult the Apostles, they declare, that every blessing we enjoy is "IN HIM, even IN HIM;" yea, that "IN HIM we are blessed with all spiritual and eternal blessings^m."]

III. Its universality—

[The greatest monarchs of this world have had a very limited sway: and many who have been called their subjects have been so rather in name than in reality. But Christ's dominion shall be strictly and literally universal: "the kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christⁿ." Already there are some of all nations who submit to his government. We may go to the most uncultivated parts of the earth, where human nature seems but little elevated above the beasts, and there we shall find some who acknowledge him as their sovereign Lord. But his dominion is certainly at present very limited. There is a time however coming, when "all nations shall call him blessed." The rich and great shall take upon them his yoke: according as it is said, "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him^o." The poor and mean also shall devote themselves to his service, according to that prediction, "Holiness to the Lord shall be written upon the bells of the horses^p." Thus shall "all know the Lord, from the least even to the greatest^q." As at this present time all the subjects of his kingdom are blessing and adoring him as the one author of all their happiness, so, at a future period, shall "every knee bow to him, and every tongue confess^r;" and "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory^s." But it is not till the day of judgment that the full accomplishment of this prophecy shall be seen. Then "a multitude that no man can number, of all nations and kindreds, and people and tongues, shall stand before him, and cry with united voices, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain! Salvation to our God, and to the Lamb for ever^t!*"]

We cannot more profitably IMPROVE this subject, than by inquiring,

1. What blessings have *we* received from Christ?

[If we be indeed subjects of his kingdom, it cannot fail but that we must have received many blessings at his hands. Has he then "blessed us" with the pardon of our sins? Has he filled us with joy and peace in believing? Has he endued

¹ Isai. xlv. 24, 25.

^m Eph. i. 3—13. where it is repeated at least eight times. Strange that any should overlook this truth.

ⁿ Rev. xi. 15. ^o ver. 10, 11.

^p Zech. xiv. 9, 20, 21.

^q Jer. xxxi. 34. ^r Rom. xiv. 11.

^s ver. 19.

^t Rev. v. 11, 12. and vii. 9, 10.

us with grace and strength to subdue our spiritual enemies? and transformed us into his own image in righteousness and true holiness? This is the criterion whereby we must judge of our interest in him: for he cannot be a Saviour to us, unless he save us from the dominion, as well as from the guilt, of all our sins.]

2. What is the disposition of our minds towards him?

[Can we possibly be partakers of his benefits, and feel no disposition to "bless his name?" Surely a grateful sense of his goodness must characterise those who are so greatly indebted to him. To those who believe, he is, and must be, precious — — —]

DCXXII.

PRAISE TO GOD FOR REDEMPTION.

Ps. lxxii. 18, 19. *Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things: and blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.*

RELIGION, as experienced by the generality, is selfish and superficial: it consists almost entirely in a desire to obtain mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, and an endeavour, through faith in him, and a surrender of the soul to him, to flee from the wrath to come. The religion of the more eminent saints is of a more diffusive and ingenuous cast: it interests the soul in all that relates to God and to the world: it delights in heavenly contemplations: it surveys with wonder and gratitude all that God has done for a ruined world; and looks forward with holy joy to those richer manifestations of his glory, which, by all his holy Prophets and Apostles, he has taught us to expect. Of this kind was the piety of David, whose Psalms display a noble, generous mind, occupied with the honour of his God and Saviour, and deeply intent on the welfare of the whole human race. The psalm before us was written, primarily, to describe the kingdom of Israel, as it should exist under the government of his son Solomon. But, beyond all doubt, a

greater than Solomon is here: and it is the Messiah's kingdom to which David ultimately refers, and which alone fully corresponds with the description here given of it.

In our further elucidation of this truth, we shall consider,

I. The "wondrous things" here referred to—

These are particularly specified throughout the psalm. We notice,

1. The nature of the Redeemer's kingdom—

[It is truly a kingdom of righteousness and peace ^a. In it no law exists which does not tend to promote the best interests of him that obeys it, and of all connected with him. Nor are the laws recorded merely in books that are inaccessible to the great mass of the people: they are inscribed on the very hearts of the people themselves; to whom a disposition is given to love and obey them: so that every subject of the empire is made both holy and happy: and of every obedient subject the King himself espouses the cause; so that, how numerous or powerful soever his enemies may be, they shall all be subdued before him, and the great leader of them all be bruised under his feet ^b.]

2. The extent of it—

[Solomon's kingdom extended over the whole of that country which had originally been promised to Abraham: but the Messiah's shall embrace the whole earth: "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him ^c." "From the rising of the sun to the going down thereof his name shall be great among the Gentiles ^d:" he shall have "the utmost ends of the earth for his possession ^e;" and "all the kingdoms of the world become his" undivided empire ^f.]

3. The means by which it shall be established—

[It was by the effusion of blood that David subdued his enemies, and conquered for his son that vast dominion: but it is not by carnal weapons that the Redeemer extends his empire. The word of God is that sword whereby he "subdues the nations to the obedience of faith." The preachers of it go forth without any human aid, like sowers to sow their seed: and it is by "an handful of corn cast by them on the tops of the mountains," that the vast field is cultivated: so

^a ver. 7.

^d Mal. i. 11.

^b ver. 4.

^e Ps. ii. 8.

^c ver. 11.

^f Rev. xi. 15.

that "the fruit thereof shakes like the woods of Lebanon, and the converts spring up and flourish like the countless piles of grass upon the earth^g." It is "a stone cut out without hands, that breaks in pieces all other kingdoms, and that fills the whole earth^h."]

4. The duration of it—

[Solomon's kingdom endured but for a little time. His son and successor had scarcely assumed the reins of government, before ten tribes out of the twelve revolted from him, and have never since been re-united into one kingdom. But Christ's kingdom shall endure for everⁱ, even "throughout all generations^k." The mode of administering the kingdom will be changed, when there shall be no more occasion for the exercise of the mediatorial office. Then, I say, "the kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father," from whom it was received^l: but of the kingdom itself there shall be no end: nor shall Christ ever cease to be the Head, the joy, the glory of his redeemed people^m.]

Such are the wonders here celebrated: and from the Psalmist we may learn,

II. The spirit with which they should be contemplated—

The Psalmist closes his review of these wonders, as we also should do,

1. With grateful adoration to God as the author of them—

[Truly, it is "God alone" that doeth these wonders. Whatever instruments he may make use of, the work is his aloneⁿ: and his should be the glory. For these things he is adored in heaven: and from us on earth should they call forth the devoutest acknowledgments. In truth, we should be even lost in wonder at the contemplation of them;—that God should ever so pity our fallen world! that he should ever use such means for our deliverance from our great enemy! that he should send his own Son to die, and "by death to overcome him that had the power of death, and thus to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage!" What shall we say to these things? If they do not fill us with wonder and gratitude and praise, "the very stones may well cry out against us."]

^g ver. 16.

^k ver. 5, 17.

^m Isai. ix. 7.

^h Dan. ii. 34, 35.

^l Dan. vii. 13, 14. with 1 Cor. xv. 24, 28.

ⁿ 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7.

ⁱ Dan. ii. 44.

2. With an ardent desire for the manifestation of them to the whole world—

[However persuaded we may be of our own interest in these things, we should not be satisfied without seeing the whole world brought to the knowledge of them. We have a debt to God, and a debt to our fellow-creatures also: *to Him*, to glorify his name; *to them*, to diffuse as widely as possible among them the blessings of salvation. On both these accounts, if there be a promise in God's word to extend this kingdom, we should say "Amen" to it. If there be a proposal amongst men to aid its extension, we should add "Amen" to it: and to every effort that is made, in whatever way, we should say "Amen, and Amen." We should long for the time, when "there shall be but one King upon all the earth, and his name One"; when "the whole earth shall be filled with his glory," and "all flesh shall see the salvation of God."]

But, in EXAMINING ourselves in relation to these things, have we not need to be ashamed?

[How little sense have we had of these wonders; and of God's glory or man's happiness, as connected with them! If we might but be saved ourselves, it has been, with the generality amongst us, of little moment whether God's glory were ever revealed to others, or his salvation experienced by others. Basely selfish as we have been, we need, every one of us, to be humbled in dust and ashes. O that we could imbibe a better spirit! Dear Brethren, let us henceforth determine, like David, to meditate on the wonders of God's love^p, and to recount them gratefully with songs of praise^q. Permit me to call upon you to bear your part, and to unite with me now in this blessed work. With David, I would say, "Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our father, for ever and ever! Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name^r." Having thus set them the example, "David said to all the congregation, Now bless the Lord your God. And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped^s." O that I might be alike successful! O that this whole congregation might resemble them! Verily, if you considered what a mercy God has vouchsafed unto you, in

^p Zech. xiv. 9.

^p Ps. lxxvii. 11—13.

^q Neh. ix. 5—24. Here the whole series of mercies, from the first election of the seed of Abraham to their complete establishment in Canaan, is distinctly mentioned, and might be *very briefly* noticed.

^r 1 Chron. xxix. 10, 11, 13.

^s 1 Chron. xxix. 20.

“delivering you from the powers of darkness, and translating you into the kingdom of his dear Son,” I should not plead in vain. Let me then, in conclusion, first address our God in the words of David: “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and triumph in thy praise!” And now let me also, in the language of that same holy prophet, offer unto God the acknowledgment due unto his name: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! and let all the people say, Amen: Praise ye the Lord^t.”]

^t Ps. cvi. 47, 48.

END OF VOL. V.





